

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN US FOREIGN POLICY

# The President, the State and the Cold War

Comparing the foreign policies of  
Truman and Reagan

James Bilsland



# The President, the State and the Cold War

US foreign policy during the Cold War has been analysed from a number of perspectives, generating large bodies of literature attempting to explain its origins, its development and its conclusion. However, there are still many questions left only partially explained. In large part this is because these accounts restrict themselves to a single level of analysis, either the international system, or the structure of the state and society. The first level of analysis, focusing on the role of individuals, has largely been excluded.

This book argues that structural theories, and any approach that limits itself to one level of analysis, are inadequate to explain the development of US foreign policy. Instead, it is necessary to incorporate the first level of analysis to bring human agency back and provide a more detailed explanation of US foreign policy. Bilsland proposes an analytical framework which incorporates presidential agency into a multi-level analysis of US foreign policy during the Cold War, constructing a multi-level case study comparison of the foreign policies of Presidents Truman and Reagan. He argues that the worldview of the president is central to agenda setting in US foreign policy-making and that the management style of the president influences both decision-making and the implementation of US foreign policy. Evidence to support this is drawn from detailed empirical analysis of Truman's foreign policy of containment in Korea and Reagan's foreign policy of rollback in Nicaragua.

This work will be of interest to students and scholars of US foreign policy, US history and international relations

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Truman and Reagan

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**To my mum, Caroline Bilsland (1955–2010)**  
**I miss you every day. I hope I make you proud.**



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# 1 Introduction

Is international politics shaped by social forces beyond the control of individuals, or do powerful individuals have a role to play in the making of history? This question lies at the heart of international politics, and social science more broadly. Unfortunately, the attention of most scholars in international relations (IR) is directed towards the study of social and structural forces. These approaches prioritise the role of structure, arguing that it is the most important explanatory factor. This raises an important question: how fully can one explain history without addressing the role of individuals? That is, how complete a picture of international relations can one have without incorporating the actions of Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, Lenin, Hitler, Napoleon, Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great? Replace these figures with others and there is no guarantee that history would have unfolded in the same manner. Historians are comfortable with acknowledging this, social scientists appear less so.

Of course, not all individuals possess the same power or have the same opportunities. The particular context facing each actor will influence the degree of opportunity or constraint they encounter. Times of crisis, domestically and internationally, provide opportunity. This is why the above list of names contains so many wartime and revolutionary leaders. But the context does not determine the action. Different individuals will not be motivated in the same way. They will perceive these opportunities and constraints differently. Churchill saw Hitler as a great threat when his colleagues did not. Individuals will rank priorities differently, as Roosevelt did by prioritising the war in Europe over the war in Asia when the US population were demanding revenge against Japan. Some will take risks, such as Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Others will not. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that individual leaders possess agency in international relations. They have the ability to make decisions that will direct the resources of their state towards an end beyond their borders. To understand and explain international relations, it is essential to incorporate human agency into our research. This monograph offers an agency-based approach to the study of international relations by analysing the role of one individual leader during a specific historical context: the President of the United States of America (US) during the Cold War.

## 2 *Introduction*

### **Research questions**

By the end of the Second World War in 1945, the dominant continental European powers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been devastated by six years of conflict. The United Kingdom (UK), although not the scene of any land battle, had suffered extensive bomb damage and exhausted almost all of its financial resources in the defeat of Germany. The European states were no longer capable of exerting the same level of influence beyond their borders. This left a power vacuum in international politics, one which would quickly be filled by two emerging great powers, the US and the Soviet Union. Their relationship would define international politics for the next 45 years, a period which would become known as the Cold War. The erstwhile allies developed a mutual distrust of each other, which quickly escalated into an international rivalry that, with the development of nuclear weapons, threatened the existence of the human race. This was a seminal period in the historical development of US foreign policy. The US established itself as a global leader in the construction of international institutions, committed itself for the first time to membership of collective security arrangements, and deployed its vast economic resources on a global scale never before seen. The result was four and a half decades of military, political, economic and ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union, which erupted in several proxy wars and the creation of a nuclear arsenal capable of assuring the mutual destruction of the US, the Soviet Union and the rest of the world.

The Cold War has been analysed from a number of perspectives, generating large bodies of literature attempting to explain its origins, development and conclusion. Within the discipline of IR, these debates have tended to be led by scholars focusing on events at the system level. Realist scholars have offered explanations emphasising the role of the anarchic system and presenting much of the Cold War as the inevitable outcome of the bipolar distribution of power.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars have emphasised the role of social and economic forces, arguing that the Cold War can be explained in terms of competing ideologies (democracy versus communism) and modes of economic organisation (free market capitalism versus central planning).<sup>2</sup> These competing approaches have been applied not only to the development of the Cold War as a whole, but also to the development of specific US foreign policies during the period, each emphasising the factors deemed most relevant by their theoretical assumptions. This debate has helped to explain many aspects of US foreign policy during the Cold War. However, there are still many questions left which have been, at best, only partially explained.

In large part, this is because these explanations restrict themselves to a single level of analysis, either the international system, or the structure of the state and society. The first level of analysis, focusing on the role of individuals, has largely been excluded from IR. It is often left to historians to incorporate the role of individual decision-makers into their analyses.<sup>3</sup> The problem for international relations students, however, is that their explanations run the

risk of determinism. They come close to arguing that the course of history is shaped by these external forces and there is little if no room for alternate courses to be steered. They have, intentionally or otherwise, removed human agency and choice from the equation.

When we turn to specific US foreign policies during the Cold War, we find that policy-makers were often faced with various options as to the direction they could possibly take. In particular, the presidencies of Harry Truman at the outset of the Cold War and Ronald Reagan at its conclusion raise interesting questions that cannot be explained by structural theories alone. For example, why did the decision to send economic aid to Greece and Turkey evolve into the Truman Doctrine and the policy to contain the Soviet Union? Why did the US intervene in Korea in 1950? Why did the Reagan Doctrine try to incorporate a policy of rollback into the containment strategy? Why did the US increasingly intervene in Nicaragua from 1981? None of these policies were predetermined or inevitable. Choices existed. The president, as chief executive, would be responsible for making the final decision and have the constitutional authority to instruct the US bureaucracy to implement the policy. The role of the president is therefore crucial to any explanation of US foreign policy during the Cold War. How the president views the world, how they process and filter information, how they organise the executive, how they work with their staff, how they make decisions, how they interact with Congress, all depend on who is president, and these factors contribute to the construction of presidential agency and influence the direction of US foreign policy. The dominant structural approaches to IR are not able to incorporate individuals into their analyses. As a result, they cannot engage with these issues of agency, choice and decision-making, and can only offer a partial explanation for US foreign policy during the Cold War.

This book argues that structural theories, and any approach that limits itself to one level of analysis, are inadequate to explain the development of US foreign policy. Instead, it is necessary to incorporate the first level of analysis to bring human agency back into international relations and provide a more detailed explanation of US foreign policy. This study proposes an analytical framework that incorporates presidential agency into a multi-level analysis of US foreign policy during the Cold War. It applies this framework to a case study comparison of the foreign policies of Presidents Truman and Reagan.

To locate the role of presidential agency in US foreign policy, it is necessary to identify how the president as an individual influences US foreign policy. This monograph argues that who is president matters. In particular, the US president influences US foreign policy through their worldview and management style. It therefore asks two case-specific research questions. First, what role did Truman's worldview and management style play in the formation of the Truman Doctrine and the decision to intervene in Korea? Second, what role did Reagan's worldview and management style play in the formulation of the Reagan Doctrine and the decision to intervene in Nicaragua? It will be



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argued that the worldview of each president helped to shape the foreign policy agenda, particularly the ranking of security threats, and contributed to the formulation of the Truman and Reagan Doctrines. Also, the president's management style, how they structured their executive and operated within this, influenced the decision-making process and implementation of policy, contributing to the evolution of US foreign policy in Korea under Truman and Nicaragua under Reagan. In doing so, it offers an agency-based approach to IR which stands in contrast with pre-existing structural theories.

This approach draws on and contributes to the growing body of literature that rejects the primacy of structure in IR. This sub-discipline known as foreign policy analysis (FPA) attempts to 'ground' IR in agent-specific theory, arguing 'all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in *human decision makers acting singly or in groups*'.<sup>4</sup> This book is an attempt to locate the role of presidential agency in US foreign policy during the Cold War administrations of Truman and Reagan. Drawing on foreign policy analysis, international relations theory, presidential studies and the historiography of US foreign policy during the Cold War, this book constructs a multi-level case study comparison of the foreign policies of Presidents Truman and Reagan. It argues that the worldview of the president is central to agenda setting in US foreign policy-making, and that the management style of the president influences both decision-making and the implementation of US foreign policy. Evidence to support this is drawn from detailed empirical analysis of Truman's foreign policy of containment in South East Asia and Reagan's foreign policy of rollback in Nicaragua.

The case studies support the argument by demonstrating the central role of Truman's and Reagan's worldviews in formulating the Truman and Reagan Doctrines. Truman's worldview contributed to the framing of Korea as a security threat, while Reagan's worldview was one of the most important factors in the ranking of Nicaragua as a first order security threat. This stands in marked contrast with structural theorists of IR, who argued that such interventions in 'non-strategic' areas were not first order foreign policy priorities for the US.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, Presidents Truman and Reagan disagreed. Reagan believed he saw a security threat in Nicaragua, even if Congress (and structural theorists) did not. Reagan was prepared to invest the resources of the US foreign policy bureaucracy and take a personal risk in attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. As a result, structural theories cannot explain why these decisions were made. The role of presidential agency must be incorporated to augment the structural approaches.

The case studies also support the argument that presidential management style is central to the foreign policy-making process of the US. Truman's choice of a formal management style and reliance on a group of advisors with similar views of communism and the Soviet Union led to the decision to authorise US troops to cross into North Korea, which resulted in Chinese forces entering the conflict. Likewise, Reagan's decision to cut several of his highest ranking foreign policy officials out of the decision-making process

over Nicaragua policy, led to the Iran–Contra scandal and the collapse of his Nicaragua policy. Presidential agency was central to both of these outcomes.

It must be stated that this study does not adopt a ‘great man of history’ approach. It does not argue that US foreign policy during the Cold War can be explained solely in terms of presidential agency. This would be an example of gross reductionism and would fail to take context into account. Instead, this work adopts an agency-based explanation of US foreign policy, emphasising presidential agency, but also locating it within a multi-level analytical framework that engages with both state-level and system-level factors. The cases support the argument that explanations of US foreign policy cannot be located solely at the level of agency or structure. In doing so, it will contribute to the growing literature incorporating agency-level factors into explanations of US foreign policy.<sup>6</sup>

## **Literature review**

This book adopts a multi-level framework by analysing the president’s interaction with the executive, the Congress and the international system. As a result, it engages with several bodies of literature: international relations theory, foreign policy analysis, presidential studies and the historiography of the Cold War. This study will attempt to combine all four bodies of literature to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the president. The ambition is for the conceptual lenses provided by IR theory and foreign policy analysis to be complemented by the detailed empirical historical research. As a result, the literature review in this chapter will focus on the conceptual literature developed by IR and FPA and the remaining literature will be included in following chapters.

## ***Agency-structure debate***

To locate the role of presidential agency in US foreign policy, it is first necessary to analyse the concept of agency. By necessity this leads us into the agency-structure debate, one of the key theoretical issues lying at the heart of social science. The issues raised by the agency-structure debate have been central to many disciplines within the social sciences, with some scholars claiming it to be the most important theoretical issue we face.<sup>7</sup> Although not as prominent a research agenda within the discipline of politics as it is in other branches of the social sciences, the debate has received some attention. Recently, several scholars have argued that questions raised by the agency-structure debate should be given more consideration by political scientists and incorporated into their analyses.<sup>8</sup> The debate revolves around the issue of whether agents are able to shape their own destiny, or whether there are structural forces beyond the control of agents which determine their fate. In this context, ‘Agency refers to the individual or group abilities (intentional or otherwise) to affect their environment. Structure usually refers to context; to the material conditions which define the range of actions available to actors’.<sup>9</sup>

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The tendency within social science has been to adopt – implicitly or explicitly – explanations resting on either structure *or* agency-based assumptions. Those scholars who privilege the role of structure in explaining social outcomes, such as political change, are defined as ‘structuralists’. They argue that society is at the mercy of the complex interaction between various types of social, economic, political and ideational structures. Individuals have no autonomous power. Their destiny is determined by structure, not by their own choice of action. Most individuals are not aware these structures exist because they cannot perceive them. As a result, the only role which individuals play is as the ‘bearers’ of structures. This approach has been criticised by the ‘intentionalists’, who argue that events must be understood and explained as the result of human action, not social structures. Intentionalists base their theories and explanations on agency. If structure is incorporated, it must be understood as the outcome of human agency. For the intentionalists, structures do not exist separately from humans. It is the actions of human beings acting as individuals or as groups that explain social behaviour and outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

With increasing attention having been focused on the agency-structure debate within social science, it is perhaps unsurprising that many scholars are beginning to reject approaches that favour either agency or structure and have instead tried to incorporate *both* into their theories. These scholars argue in favour of ‘dialectical’ approaches. As the name suggests, these scholars wish to investigate how structure and agency are related. They are concerned with the interaction between structure and agency, arguing that both affect each other. This has generated a further debate.<sup>11</sup>

In one corner are those who adopt ‘structuration’ theory. They argue that structure and agency are not separate entities. Instead, each is dependent on the other: they are two sides of the same coin. Giddens argues that structures may constrain human action, but structures consist of resources as well as rules. This opens up the possibility of structures actually enabling agents to choose particular courses of action. Even more so, the actions taken by individuals may have the potential to change the structure.<sup>12</sup> In the opposite corner are those who reject Giddens’ claim that agency and structure are the same thing. Hay and Jessop argue that agency and structure are distinct concepts.<sup>13</sup> Structures exist that shape the landscape of human action. However, this structure is strategically selective. It privileges certain strategies at the expense of others. Hay argues that structures do not treat all agents equally, that some players are strategically advantaged.<sup>14</sup> As a result, structures act to constrain and enable depending on the context. Hay and Jessop assume that individuals are aware of these structures and, as a result, are able to develop strategies and tactics that help them to reduce the constraints placed on them by structure. Through the process of trial and error individuals are able to influence and change structures. Hay refers to this as ‘strategic learning’: ‘agents are reflexive, capable of reformulating within limits their own identities and interests, and able to engage in strategic calculation about their current situation’.<sup>15</sup> These calculations will produce outcomes,

some of which will be intended, but some may be unintended. As a result, structural change may result from the unintended consequences of human agency.<sup>16</sup>

The purpose of this monograph is to offer an agency-based explanation of US foreign policy within a multi-level framework. It therefore rejects structuralism and intentionalism approaches in favour of a dialectical approach, drawing on the work of Hay and Jessop. It conceptualises the president as a political actor within the existing domestic and international structures of the time. As will be discussed in future chapters, the domestic political structure of the US grants the president an advantage in foreign policy over other US domestic political actors, whilst the international structure grants the US an advantage as one of the great powers. The US president is able to formulate strategies that allow him to overcome domestic and international constraints, for example Reagan's search for external funding for the Contras to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, but their actions may also generate unintended consequences, such as the Iran–Contra scandal which resulted from Reagan's search for external funds. The book will investigate this relationship between presidential agency and structure throughout.

### *Levels of analysis in international relations*

Traditionally in IR, 'level of analysis' has been presented as a 'problem' that requires a 'solution'. This idea was given credence by the publication of Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State and War* where he argued that to explain the existence of war, analysts must focus on the international system.<sup>17</sup> This argument was developed further by Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*.<sup>18</sup> Whether or not this constitutes 'the' theory of international politics as Waltz claims (his many critics would suggest otherwise), the importance of this publication for IR is that it created the division between IR theory and foreign policy. Waltz is quite explicit on this matter. His theory operates at one level of generality, foreign policy exists at another. Much of IR since the 1970s has been dominated by structural approaches.

Neorealism has established itself as the predominant structural IR theory. It claims its strength lies in the theory's ability to explain political outcomes at the level of the international system across time and regardless of the particular states involved. This is because, neorealists argue, systemic forces are at play which shape state behaviour in certain directions. The key theoretical claim is that the international system is anarchic and all states, weak or powerful, past or present, must operate within this environment. For neorealist theoretical explanations, the internal characteristics of the states do not matter. The only individual property driving the theory is the material capabilities possessed by each state, and this is incorporated into the system-level by focusing on the distribution of material capabilities across it. The anarchic nature of the international system means that states must provide for their own security. Therefore they are concerned with the relative distribution of

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material capabilities, and the relative gains made by each state in this regard. The outcome of this process is the development of international balance of power politics, as states try to increase their power and other states try to stop this from happening. State behaviour is explained in terms of these system-level forces.<sup>19</sup>

Although structural approaches have dominated orthodox IR for the past 40 years, the study of the domestic sources of foreign policy has not been completely marginalised. Indeed, the discipline of FPA has established itself as a methodological and theoretically diverse academic discipline. This sub-field of international relations scholarship challenges the assumptions of the rational actor model of the state in an attempt to explain state behaviour by looking at 'internal' sources. Of crucial importance to FPA is its analysis of decision-making, particularly at the level of government leaders and the upper-echelons of the foreign policy bureaucracy. Foreign policy analysts wish to locate the role of political agency in international relations.<sup>20</sup> To do this, they argue that foreign policy must be broken down into its constituent parts and processes in an attempt to determine how choices are made and which actors have the most influence on the process. As Christopher Hill has argued, 'FPA has the capacity to indicate the extent to which the nature of the decision-making process determines the outcomes of foreign policy, in terms of both the intrinsic quality of a decision and its effective implementation.'<sup>21</sup>

Foreign policy analysts argue that the outcomes of the foreign policy process are much more complex than abstract theories allow. They try to engage with the reality that:

causation always includes both structures and agents, and that ... the two kinds of phenomena help to constitute each other in a perpetual process of interaction. This means by definition, that it is impossible to come to fixed conclusions about the limits to agents' freedom of choice or their capacity for impact.<sup>22</sup>

This is important for understanding the relationship between the domestic and international contexts. It is increasingly difficult to separate the international from the domestic. Instead of viewing each as a separate entity, scholars of foreign policy are increasingly viewing the choice not as one of international or domestic, but of accepting that each makes up 'two ends of a continuum rather than being sharply demarcated'.<sup>23</sup> Whereas most structural theorists refuse to study domestic variables in their quest for generality and parsimony, foreign policy analysts begin with the assumption that foreign policy is formulated in a domestic setting, and then it is operationalised in an international setting where the existing structure will contribute, in varying degrees, to the policy's success or failure as a result of the constraints or freedoms that the system presents. The underlying assumption fuelling much of contemporary foreign policy analysis is that individual agents (be they states or policy-makers) are able to influence structure to a greater degree

than most structural theorists are willing to accept. Hill is clear on this issue: 'Since structures are consistently influenced by agents, they are always in flux and should not be regarded as fixed entities like an engineering jig, with precise, limited and determining qualities'.<sup>24</sup>

This may raise criticism that FPA is too reductionist and too individualistic, but again Hill is quick to respond to this charge, 'Individuals are the original source of intentions, and they make a difference. But they never work in a vacuum, and the pattern of their institutional and political environment will have a big influence on how they see the world'.<sup>25</sup> Powerful individuals will have influence at the domestic level, and powerful states will have more influence at the international level. Therefore, the questions needing to be addressed are: which agents make a difference, and under what circumstances? This discussion of FPA's conception of the agency-structure debate leads us on to FPA's methodological approach.

Far from seeking parsimony and generality, most analysts reject the possibility of a general theory of foreign policy being developed, that is, a general theory that 'synthesises' the existing approaches to produce the FPA equivalent of Waltz's theory. Instead, foreign policy analysts adopt a myriad of methodological approaches that strike a balance between theory and empirical research, 'geographical and historical specifics are taken to be more important than abstractions like bipolarity and multipolarity'.<sup>26</sup> Hill argues strongly in favour of a pluralist approach, stressing that the complexity of the foreign policy-making process, in particular the amount and types of actors involved, necessitates a variety of methods ranging from middle-range and weak theories, to history and discourse analysis.<sup>27</sup> Carlsnaes, however, does not rule out the possibility 'a synthetic framework for analysing foreign policy is indeed possible, but that it has to be on a level of abstraction that does not substantively prejudge explanation in favour of any particular type or combination of empirical factors'.<sup>28</sup> What we can summarise though is that FPA involves flexibility in many key debates, particularly questions regarding agency-structure, domestic-international and theory-empirical issues.

### **Analytical framework**

The framework developed by this book is located firmly within this scholarly tradition. It is agent-centred, focusing on a specific individual: the president of the US. It is geographically specific, focusing on the US political system. It is multi-level, realising that US foreign policy does not exist in a vacuum and must be contextualised within the international system. Finally, it is contextual; focusing on two specific historical case studies from which the empirical evidence required to support the analysis of the president will be drawn.

This study will focus on the president's relationship with the executive, the congress, the international system and the interaction between these different levels. The president's role within the domestic US political system of separated powers, and the impact this has on the president's ability to conduct foreign

policy will be analysed in Chapter 2. This multi-level framework of the domestic and international will form the structure of the case studies in Chapters 3-6, and form the basis for the comparison between the case studies conducted in the penultimate chapter.

Having discussed how agency and structure have been conceptualised at the theoretical level, it is now necessary to begin constructing the definition of presidential agency that will be applied in this monograph. To analyse the role of individual humans in international relations we must turn to the discipline of foreign policy analysis. The attempt to ground international relations at the level of agent- and actor-centred theory provides us with a general conceptualisation of agency. The emphasis lies on the existence of choice and the potential for individuals to influence their future courses of action. Where choice exists, decisions must be made. As a result, foreign policy analysis must contend itself with decision-making. Outcomes in international relations must be grounded in individuals making decisions. Therefore, in foreign policy, agency 'entails individual human beings taking decisions and implementing them on behalf of entities which possess varying degrees of coherence, organization and power – of which the most effective are generally states'.<sup>29</sup> It is political agency this book contends with, the extent to which an individual invested with political power is able to turn these resources into policy outcomes when operating within a specific political context. This is foreign policy agency at the general level.

However, these decision-makers are not abstract entities. The focus of this study is on one particular individual, the president of the US, and a specific context, US foreign policy during the Cold War. Therefore, we need to move our definition of foreign policy agency towards a construct of presidential agency in US foreign policy. The literature on this topic is large, covering a vast array of topics and perspectives; however, it can be grouped into two broad categories.<sup>30</sup> The first are those who adopt the rational actor model. The president is conceived as a rational, self-interested actor, making choices strategically on the basis of cost-benefit analysis. This is the hallmark of the positivist 'scientific' approach to the study of politics and maintains all the assumptions of its microeconomic origins: exogenous preferences, perfect information and the ability of the president to calculate expected utility.<sup>31</sup> The second are those who question the usefulness of this approach and/or reject it outright. The criticisms are various. Some challenge the assumptions of the model, arguing that it is too abstract, particularly the assumption of perfect information. Herbert Simon developed the idea of 'satisficing' to convey the idea that, in reality, decision-makers do not necessarily choose the 'best' option in terms of that with the highest level of utility, but instead satisfy themselves by choosing an option that meets a lower standard of acceptability. The reason decision-makers will 'satisfice' is because they do not know the expected probabilities of each outcome and therefore cannot calculate outcomes with high level precision. This led to the development of the concept of bounded rationality and its application to decision-making.<sup>32</sup> Others

reject the rational actor model outright. Political psychologists argue that human behaviour does not conform to the rational actor model. This can be to the result of individual traits, such as learned habits, as well as group dynamics, such as group think.<sup>33</sup> Political scientists have also challenged the rational actor model, arguing that it diminishes the role of organisational context and bureaucratic politics.<sup>34</sup>

We are therefore presented with an almost unlimited number of ways in which we could construct presidential agency. However, this monograph proposes a specific multi-level framework, looking at the president's relationship with the international system, the executive and Congress. We therefore need a construction of presidential agency that can be operationalised within this framework. FPA again offers us the tools to do this. It grounds us in decision-making, emphasising the importance of the policy-making process. Foreign policy analysts have conceived of the policy-making process as taking place in a series of stages: agenda setting, decision-making and implementation.<sup>35</sup> As a result, it is necessary to conceptualise presidential agency in relation to this process. How does the president influence agenda setting, decision-making and implementation? What individual differences does the president bring to the process? What concepts and approaches from the existing literature allow us to identify and analyse the role of the president in this process?

To locate the role of the president, this book proposes a two-stage analysis focusing on the worldview and management style of the president. This allows us to tie the president into the multi-level analytical framework. The president's worldview links them to the international system and provides the filters through which they as individuals conceptualise US foreign policy. A president's worldview contributes to how they establish foreign policy priorities and rank security threats. This directly influences agenda setting. Analysing the president's management style allows us to locate the president within the executive and establish their relationship with Congress. In turn, we can then assess the impact Presidents Truman and Reagan had on the domestic sources of foreign policy and decision-making by investigating their relationship with other actors in the foreign policy process, namely executive bureaucrats and members of the legislature. By combining the two approaches we can trace the development of individual foreign policies. Specifically, how policies originate in relation to the president's worldview, and how the president attempts to choose and implement these policies via their management style.

The study does not argue that presidential agency can be captured entirely by focusing on the president's worldview and management style. No single concept or theory can explain everything. To try to claim so would result in reification. Instead, worldview and management style offers us the chance to examine a particular aspect of presidential agency in relation to existing models of policy-making, the impact the president has on agenda setting, decision-making and implementation, and allows us to apply this within the multi-level framework developed by this book.<sup>36</sup>



The concept of worldview has been incorporated into the construct of presidential agency and the analytical framework of this study for several reasons. It allows the analysis to focus specifically on the individual president and to compare the impact of different presidents holding different worldviews on the development of US foreign policy. As will be discussed, it not only allows us to analyse how each president views the world, but also which aspects of a president's worldview impact the president's political behaviour. Worldview impacts information processing, decision-making, and how the president constructs their identities of self and others, which, in turn, allows them to rank foreign policy priorities and security threats. In doing so, a clear link between presidential worldview and agenda-setting can be drawn, allowing worldview to be incorporated into the traditional policy-making model of agenda setting, decision-making and implementation. As will now be shown, the study of presidential worldviews is well established in the literature.

One of the earliest contributions to the literature on worldviews was David Barber, who offered the following definition: 'A president's world view consists of his primary, politically relevant beliefs, particularly his conceptions of social causality, human nature, and the central moral conflicts of the time. This is how he sees the world and his lasting opinions about what he sees'.<sup>37</sup> From this initial definition, one can see that the concept of worldview is more than simply how a decision-maker 'views the world'. Perception of the external environment plays a significant role, but perception does not stand alone. It is intertwined with the concepts of beliefs and motivation. It is necessary, therefore, to try to unpack the relationship between these concepts.

Perception is the starting point. Although Jervis is often the place of departure for many works on perception, it is possible to trace the origins of perceptions to the earliest days of foreign policy analysis.<sup>38</sup> Sprout and Sprout, building on the work of Snyder *et al.*, developed the idea of the 'psychomilieu' to highlight the relationship between the international environment and the decision-maker's perception of it.<sup>39</sup> As Hudson has explained, 'The psycho-milieu is the international and operational environment or context as it is perceived and interpreted by ... decisionmakers'.<sup>40</sup> From this insight has grown a substantial literature on the role of perceptions in decision-making, spanning political psychology and international relations theory.<sup>41</sup>

A definition of perception will be drawn from the existing literature to contribute to the current analysis of the concept of worldview. Voss and Dorsey define perception as 'an integrative process by which stimuli become interpreted by the individual, the process taking place via the integration of the stimulus events with the prior knowledge and beliefs of the individual'.<sup>42</sup> This definition is used because it explicitly links perceptions to the pre-existing beliefs held by the individual. The decision-maker does not perceive the world from the position of an objective blank slate. The life experiences of the individual shape their perception of the world. The specific life experience on which the current analysis focuses is the political motivation held by the individual.

Drawing on the work of Hermann *et al.*, it is assumed that decision-makers are motivated in one of two ways.<sup>43</sup> One group is driven by ideology and a purpose. Members set goals and work to achieve them. The other group is contextually sensitive and looks to respond to the situation in which members find themselves. In terms of the typologies' relationship to perceptions, Hermann *et al.* find that the goal-driven group tend to perceive the world through 'a lens that is structured by their beliefs, attitudes, motives and passions'.<sup>44</sup> As a result of this, decision-makers who are goal driven tend to selectively perceive information from external sources. Over time this will reinforce the pre-conceptions of the individual, making it unlikely that they will change their pre-held attitudes and beliefs. Contextually sensitive leaders, on the other hand, tend not to view the world through a lens. To respond to the situation facing them, such decision-makers try to keep information channels open to maximise their options.<sup>45</sup> This demonstrates the link between worldview and agenda-setting. A leader driven by specific goals and purposes will pursue a narrow agenda that attempts to push the state's foreign policy in the direction of the leader's 'vision'.<sup>46</sup> George W. Bush, the Bush Doctrine and the conduct of the Iraq War provide evidence to support this typology of a president pursuing one, narrow foreign policy goal.<sup>47</sup> Contextually responsive leaders will adopt a less focused agenda and will pursue a variety of goals because they lack a policy vision derived from their worldview. Bill Clinton's foreign policy 'incoherence' is often held as a model of this typology.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, presidential worldview plays a crucial role in the ranking of foreign policy priorities and security threats. This is because of the image the president holds of others. How a president 'frames' others, for example as allies, collaborators, rivals or enemies, attributes to them an identity which in turn stimulates pre-held beliefs held by the president as to how the 'others' should be dealt with.<sup>49</sup> If the president assigns a positive identity, the president will look for ways to cooperate with the foreign state. If the president assigns a negative identity, the foreign state will be ranked as a security threat.<sup>50</sup> This demonstrates the way in which individual presidents make a difference in terms of helping to set the foreign policy agenda.

The term 'worldview' can have more than one definition to different scholars in various contexts. To some philosophers, worldview is conceived as 'Weltanschauung', namely the beliefs held by individuals about the nature of the world. When these beliefs are shared by a group or society as a whole they are often referred to as ideology.<sup>51</sup> This is where conceptual confusion between the terms worldview and ideology can arise. However, the current analysis is grounded in the study of foreign policy and individual decision-makers, not philosophy. In the context of this project, the term worldview is applied to an individual decision-maker, the president of the US, to determine how their pre-existing beliefs affect how they perceive the world, process information and make decisions. An 'ideological' worldview in this context refers to a president who holds a closed belief system. They will tend to view the world in dichotomous terms: good and bad, black and white.

Information contrary to their worldview will be ignored while information that confirms their worldview will be used to reinforce their prior beliefs. As a result, their worldview will remain fixed. This contrasts with those who hold a 'pragmatic' worldview. They will be open to new sources of information and will be less likely to ignore or manipulate information to support their pre-existing beliefs. They will exhibit more flexibility, both in their beliefs and decision-making.<sup>52</sup>

The second component of our construct of presidential agency is the president's management style. Again, this has been chosen because it allows us to locate the role of the president within our analytical framework and the traditional policy-making model outlined above. As head of the executive, the president plays an integral role in the decision-making and implementation stage of the US foreign policy-making process. Therefore, how the president structures his executive, how he interacts with his staff, how he operates within this system, how he receives, selects and processes information, in short how the president marshals their political resources, all contribute to decision-making and the implementation of policy. This is an important aspect of presidential agency because the choice of management style is the result of the individual preferences of the president. As will be shown in the case studies, the president's choice of management style is largely the result of their previous experiences of management. Truman's management style was a direct result of his time in the army and US Senate, whereas Reagan drew on his experience of executive government from his time as Governor of California. Therefore, who is president matters because they each have different management preferences as a result of their historical experiences.

To implement his foreign policy agenda, the president must work closely with a variety of foreign policy actors. In light of this, a growing body of literature has developed in foreign policy analysis examining the relationship between leaders and their advisors.<sup>53</sup> This book will adopt the typology developed by George and Johnson.<sup>54</sup> Facing the complexities of foreign policy making in the US, the president relies on a team of advisors whose job is to provide information to allow him to make decisions, as well as help the president coordinate the multitude of actors involved in implementing policy. A crucial relationship exists between the president and their advisors, which is in large part determined by the personal characteristics of the president. As George has argued, 'the incumbent's personality will shape the formal structure of the policymaking system that he creates around himself, and, even more, it will influence the ways in which he encourages and permits that formal structure to operate in practice'.<sup>55</sup> George builds on the seminal typology of Johnson, who suggested that there are three ways of managing the modern presidency: the formalistic, collegial and competitive styles.<sup>56</sup>

The formal style attempts to bring order to the seeming chaos of foreign policy-making. The president sits at the top of a hierarchical structure, advisors are given responsibility for specific issues, there is little overlap of roles and options filter up to the president. The logic behind this style is that issues

of lesser importance can be decided at lower levels, thus allowing the president to focus on making the final decision on the most important issues. The competitive management style is usually adopted by a president who wishes to encourage conflict among his advisors to maximise the amount of information that flows into his office, allowing him to hear a diversity of views. To do this he will structure the executive to create overlapping jurisdictions and organisational ambiguity. The collegial model stresses the importance of diverse opinions and competition in the policy-making process. However, whereas the competitive model often leads to conflicts of interest based on jurisdictional parochialism, the collegial model attempts to encourage departmental heads to identify with the president's perspective and build consensus. To do this the president will encourage close cooperation among his advisors.<sup>57</sup>

George develops Johnson's framework by identifying three personal characteristics that influence the president's management of the foreign policy process. The first trait George identifies is the president's cognitive style, which focuses on how the president processes information. If the president is driven by an ideology and has a specific agenda he wishes to achieve, then he will likely surround himself with advisors who share the same goals. If the president prefers to respond to the context in which he finds himself, then he is likely to want advisors who can provide him with a wide variety of expert information. The second is the belief the president has in his own capabilities as they relate to management and decision-making, which issues he feels comfortable dealing with and his overall level of engagement in the policy-making process. If the president has issues in which he is particularly interested, then he is likely to focus on these more. The third is the extent to which the president is tolerant of conflict among advisors. A president who can tolerate conflict may choose a more competitive style of management, whereas those presidents who do not enjoy conflict are more likely to create a formal or collegial system. George acknowledges that his management styles represent ideal types, and in reality presidents may adopt features of all three or stay closer to one type. However, this is an important insight for our construct of presidential agency because it demonstrates the extent to which the president's choice of management style is directly linked to individual preferences. Different presidents will adopt different management styles as a result of personal preferences and experiences, and this in turn will impact the foreign policy-making process.<sup>58</sup>

Recent developments in presidential decision-making studies have tried to refine these typologies by including more variables and increasing their complexity.<sup>59</sup> Although useful for the purpose of attempting theoretical development, the increased complexity makes it difficult to incorporate them within the multi-level analysis developed by this book. Instead, the original work of Johnson and George will be incorporated into the multi-level framework of analysis. This will allow the role of the president to be located not just in relation to the executive, but also to the Congress and the international system.

**Methodology**

The case studies of Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan have been selected for several reasons. The first is a result of the analytical framework developed in this project. The study adopts an agency-based approach analysing the role of the president operating within the multi-level environment of US foreign policy-making. As a result, to limit the effects of structural changes, it is necessary to try and keep the structural environment as constant as possible. Therefore the research will focus on two presidents drawn from the Cold War period when both presidents faced a bipolar international system. Second, in terms of the historical context, the case studies have been selected on the basis of their relationship to the development of the Cold War. The presidency of Harry Truman allows the project to analyse the role of the president in the origins of the Cold War, while the presidency of Ronald Reagan allows for a comparison of the role of the president in the final days of the Cold War. Thirdly, the cases have been selected because they allow a comparison of the role of the president in the formulation of two distinct foreign policy doctrines, containment during the Truman Administration and rollback during the Reagan Administration.

Finally, the case studies have been selected for methodological reasons. To construct the level of detail required to locate and analyse the role of the president in US foreign policy-making it is essential to have access to a wide selection of primary documents. Unfortunately for scholars, these foreign policy and national security documents are classified by the US government for at least 30 years, making it impossible for a research project based on the proposed analytical framework to adopt a contemporary focus. Therefore, it has been necessary to adopt a historical perspective. No restrictions are in place for documents produced during the Truman Administration. As a result there is a wealth of material available for analysis. Unfortunately, many documents from the Reagan Administration are still classified, particularly the minutes of National Security Council (NSC) and National Security Planning Group (NSPG) meetings. However, as discussed in the following section, as a result of the Iran-Contra scandal, the subsequent government investigation, and the freedom of information requests from the National Security Archive, a wealth of documents on Nicaragua have been declassified and released for public viewing. The availability of these documents forms the justification for the choice of this book to analyse Nicaragua policy during the Reagan years.

This study draws on a wealth of primary documents collected during extensive fieldwork at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland; the National Security Archive at George Washington University; the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Missouri; and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California. A vast array of sources were consulted to locate and analyse the role of the president. Of fundamental importance are the declassified documents from the highest levels of the US government. These include: minutes of the meetings of the National Security

Council; minutes of meetings of the National Security Planning Group during the Reagan administration; minutes of meetings of the Cabinet; minutes of meetings held between the president and his highest level advisors and minutes of meetings between the president and members of Congress. These sources are valuable because they provide a documentary record of the positions taken by the president and advisors, the information the president consulted, the views the president held and expressed at these meetings, whether these views changed or not, the decisions that were made, how these decisions were implemented and what, if any, changes the president made on the basis of this implementation.

Supplementing the official documentary record of the decision-making process are the briefing papers, memos and documents prepared by the mid-to lower-level bureaucrats and the role these played in providing the president with information on which their decisions were based. These documents allow us to construct a detailed picture of each president's worldview as they are the historical record of classified meetings where the president would be able to state his own views, rather than adapting them for public and political consumption. In terms of the second part of the analytical framework, these documents provide evidence to support analysis of the president's management style. They allow us to piece together how the president wanted his executive to run and, more importantly, they allow us to compare this with how the documentary record suggests it was actually run.

However, there are limitations to the official record. The National Archives and Presidential Libraries are only able to hold and display a small percentage of all the papers created during each administration. This does not hamper the present study too much because it focuses on the highest level of presidential decision-making and, unsurprisingly, these documents are kept as a priority.<sup>60</sup>

The declassification process also places limitations on the study. Most national security documents are classified for 30 years.<sup>61</sup> This did not hamper the case study of Truman as all of the foreign policy documents from his administration have been declassified and are available for research in the National Archives and the Truman Library. The Reagan Administration, however, provides a methodological challenge. The vast majority of national security documents at the Reagan Library are still classified. As a result they are not available for scholarly research. However, over the past few years, documents from the earliest years of the Reagan Administration have finally been declassified. This study forms one of the first academic works to make use of these primary documents.

Although the vast majority of Reagan era national security documents are still classified, there is one area that does not suffer from the same level of restriction. As a result of the Iran–Contra scandal, a large amount of documents on Reagan's Nicaragua policy were declassified to form the basis of subsequent government investigations. These documents still would not have been released to the wider public without the efforts of the National Security Archive at George Washington University. Campaigning under the Freedom

of Information Act, this non-government organisation requested that these documents be made available to the public. As a result, copies of these documents are now held by the National Security Archive and they provide the richest selection of high-level national security primary sources currently available on the Reagan Administration's foreign policy in Nicaragua. These documents include minutes of the National Security Council meetings and National Security Planning Group meetings where aid to the Contras and covert operations were discussed and authorised. These primary sources are of incredible importance to the present research, and form the empirical basis of the Reagan case study. This also demonstrates the importance of not relying on one source of documents. If I had limited my search solely to the Reagan Library, I would not have found the quantity and quality of foreign policy sources available at the National Security Archive.

Not all views are expressed at formal meetings, nor are all decisions made there.<sup>62</sup> For example, Reagan's decision to authorise the NSC staff to search for alternative sources of funding for the Contras in Nicaragua was not taken at a meeting of the NSC, therefore it is not documented in the official minutes. It is only thanks to the subsequent Congressional hearings on the Iran-Contra scandal, and the testimonies of key individuals such as National Security Advisors (NSA) Robert McFarlane and John Poindexter, that we have access to this information. As a result, we must be aware that the minutes of these meetings can never tell the whole story. The documentary record can offer only a snapshot of the decision-making process. These documents must be supplemented with other primary sources.<sup>63</sup>

Important in terms of providing context, filling in gaps in our knowledge and offering first-hand interpretations, the memoirs of the president and US foreign policy officials are an invaluable source. They provide valuable information to support the documentary record. Again, we must be aware of the limitations of memoirs. As they are written after the event it is possible that the author may not remember events correctly. Also, these memoirs may be written with an agenda to promote a specific interpretation of the period, often one which tries to present the author's role in a positive light and as a result glosses over the negatives. To counter this, it is important to consult a wide variety of memoirs.<sup>64</sup> This monograph incorporates both the memoirs of the presidents themselves and a selection of memoirs from high- and mid-ranking foreign policy officials.

Presidential diaries are a useful primary source because they detail the president's thoughts from the contemporary vantage point in a way which memoirs alone do not. These are useful for constructing the president's view of policy, decision-making, his colleagues, his relationship with Congress and his interpretation of international events. Again, they may suffer from the same limitations as memoirs. Even so close to events, the president may be trying to protect his legacy.<sup>65</sup>

Newspapers provide another important primary source, especially for the Reagan case study. Classified documents are sometimes leaked to the media.

Therefore, it is important to research contemporary media sources to discover if they have written articles based on leaked documents. These are important especially if they are able to attribute quotations to officials involved in decision-making.<sup>66</sup>

Because of the historical nature of the project, there is limited scope for conducting interviews with the relevant figures. Contemporary media again forms an important source, in this instance providing data in the form of direct quotations from the president and other foreign policy officials collected during interviews with journalists. This again helps to ground the study in primary sources, facilitating the construction of each president's worldview and generating important insights into their decision-making.

This wide selection of sources has been employed to strengthen the validity, that is the correctness and precision of the results, of the research methodology undertaken. This is in line with the research strategy of triangulation, which argues that several methods and sources of research must be adopted.<sup>67</sup>

## **Outline of chapters**

To answer the questions posed in the introduction, Chapter 2 locates the role of the presidency as an institution and the president as an actor in the US domestic political context. The chapter begins with an overview of the president's formal powers, and how these operate in the system of separate institutions sharing power as laid out by the constitution. The chapter proceeds to analyse the development of the institution of the presidency over time. The chapter argues that debates over what the founding fathers intended are less important for understanding US foreign policy than how the institution of the presidency was 'operationalised' by successive presidents. The central thesis developed in this chapter is that the institutional battle for power in US foreign policy-making has swung from the Congress to the presidency as a direct result of the actions of individual presidents.

The chapter then focuses on how personal characteristics of the president impact on the functioning of the office. The chapter argues that the management style of the president in large part determines how decisions are made within the executive, and this in turn contributes to how effectively the president is able to direct foreign policy. A president who struggles to control his own White House may soon find himself faced with a crisis of his own making. Once a decision is made in the White House, the president then confronts the problem of implementation. In doing so, he faces the harsh and complex reality of 'his' bureaucracy. The chapter addresses the fact that it is not simply the case that the Chief Executive commands his Executive Departments and they obey his order. Each department has their own interests, loyalties and operating procedures, which can both help and hinder presidential initiative. How the president attempts to deal with this dilemma is of crucial importance to effective foreign policy-making. This also relates to the president's management style and how he decides to structure the executive. This chapter



argues that central to presidential control of foreign policy-making is how he chooses to structure the relationship between the secretary of state and the national security advisor.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the foreign policy of Harry Truman. They analyse the role played by Truman in formulating a policy of 'containment' of the Soviet Union and how this was applied in the context of Korea. The chapters argue that Truman's management style contributed directly to the growth of presidential power in foreign policy and laid the foundations for future centralisation in the White House. Chapter 3 analyses Truman and the birth of Containment. The decision to involve the US in a worldwide anti-communist foreign policy was not inevitable. This chapter argues that Truman's worldview was fundamental to the decision-making process.

Chapter 4 analyses the development of Truman's management style and its application to policy-making during the Korean War. The first section details Truman's management system and his attempts to organise his executive. It argues that Truman developed a formal management system based on his individual preferences which had developed during his time in the army and US Senate. It demonstrates how important personal relationships were to the functioning of Truman's presidency by focusing on the president's relationships with his secretaries of state. The second section takes the form of a case study of the Korean War and focuses on the role played by Truman's management style in the decisions to frame Korea as a security threat, intervene in the war and cross the border into North Korea. The central argument presented is that both Truman's choice of management structure and how he operated within this system are central to understanding the debacle of US intervention in the Korean War.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the foreign policy of Ronald Reagan. They analyse the role played by Reagan in formulating a policy of 'rollback' of the Soviet Union and how this was applied in the context of Nicaragua. These chapters argue that although Reagan is well known for his detached style of leadership, which involved the development of a formal management style and the delegation of power to his subordinates in the executive, in the areas of foreign policy that he deemed of utmost importance he was willing to involve himself in the formulation of policy and was prepared to exploit the powers of his office in attempting to achieve his desired goal. The chapters argue that Reagan's proclivity for grand strategising at the expense of grasping the finer details of policy-making, coupled with his hands-off formal management style, set his administration on the path towards the Iran-Contra scandal.

Chapter 5 begins by placing the Reagan Administration in historical context. Late 1970s US foreign policy was marked by arguments over the idea of American decline and Soviet resurgence. The election of Ronald Reagan offered a strong counter to ideas of American decline and brought forward resurgence in support of increased American assertiveness in international relations. Drawing on the analytical framework developed in Chapter 1, the

Reagan case study analyses the individual characteristics of Ronald Reagan, particularly his view of American power and the Soviet Union, his vision for American foreign policy and how this shaped his attitude to executing the functions of the office of the presidency. Chapter 6 uses the example of Reagan to highlight the potential for presidential agency in US foreign policy by analysing how Reagan was able to pursue his anti-Sandinista agenda by continuing to support the Contras even when a clear majority in Congress did not support him. This involved the president deliberately cutting his senior advisors out of the decision-making process, leading to a breakdown of his management system and the Iran–Contra scandal.

Chapter 7 will conduct a comparison of the foreign policies of presidents Truman and Reagan to establish the impact the president has on the formulation of US foreign policy. The chapter will proceed in three sections looking at the sources and constraints of presidential autonomy. The first section begins with the external environment each president confronts in the shape of the international system. This section will argue that the president's worldview is crucial in determining the general orientation of US foreign policy during each administration. The second section focuses on the internal sources and constraints of the executive bureaucracy. Unsurprisingly, as Chief Executive, the president has greater control over events within this environment. However, more room for presidential manoeuvre results in opportunities for both success and failure. This section will argue that the management style adopted by the president becomes an important factor in all aspects of foreign policy, including decision-making and implementation. The third and final section places the president within the context of the US system of separated powers. It will look at how the constitutional settlement, which forces the president and Congress to share foreign policy power, creates a system of formal constraints with which each president must contend. The argument presented here is that how the president works with Congress is central to the success of their foreign policy.

Throughout the chapter it will be noted that each of these sources and constraints do not exist in isolation. It will be shown how the relationship between all three, and the president's awareness of and ability to work within this multi-level environment, determines the extent to which a president is able to maintain presidential autonomy and control over the direction of US foreign policy. The chapter will argue that the constraints facing the president are not fixed. They change as a result of both exogenous factors beyond the president's control (the foreign policies of foreign states and elections to congress, for example) and directly as a result of presidential actions, such as choice of management style and decision-making.

Chapter 8 will conclude the book by placing Truman and Reagan within the wider context of US foreign policy during the Cold War and assessing their legacies. It will then proceed with a final analysis of the wider conceptual issues raised by the study of presidential agency in US foreign policy. The

chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the present study and possibilities for future research.

This monograph will make several contributions to the academic literature. This is the first time the presidencies of Truman and Reagan and the policies of Containment, Korea, Rollback and Nicaragua have been compared to such an extent within this multi-level approach. From the detailed empirical analysis, this study will draw wider conclusions about the role of Truman in the origins of the Cold War, the role of Reagan in its conclusion and the role of the president in US foreign policy-making. Secondly, this study is one of the first to incorporate the recently declassified National Security Council documents from the Reagan Library. This makes a new contribution to the historiography of the Reagan administration and presents evidence to support the argument made in this study that Reagan was more active in certain policy areas than previously acknowledged by existing scholars. Finally, by developing a multi-level framework rooted in foreign policy analysis, and applying it to the role of the president in US foreign policy, it makes a contribution to agency-based perspectives in the study of international relations, foreign policy analysis and US foreign policy.

## Notes

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- 3 Historians have produced a vast literature on the Cold War. This is often divided into three competing groups of scholars. The ‘orthodox’ historians argue that the Soviet Union was to blame for the outbreak of the Cold War. They characterised US foreign policy as purely reactive to Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe. Examples of this type of work include: Feis, H. (1967) *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); Feis, H. (1970) *From Trust to Terror: The Onset of the Cold War, 1945–1950* (London: Blond); and Schlesinger Jr., A. (1967) ‘Origins of the Cold War’, *Foreign Affairs*, 46, pp. 22–52. By the late 1960s, this view was challenged by ‘revisionist’ scholars who believed that the US was largely responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War. They argued that US foreign policy was driven by economic self-interest and the need for US capital and businesses to gain access to new foreign markets. This led to a form of economic ‘imperialism’, which saw the US use its economic and military power to construct a post-war order that would protect American interests. The revisionists argue that this culminated in the Vietnam War. Examples of revisionist works include: Williams, W.A. (1959) *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: World Publishing Company); Horowitz, D. (1967) *From Yalta to Vietnam: American Foreign Policy in the Cold War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin); Kolko, G. and Kolko, J. (1972) *The Limits of Power: the World and United States Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper Row). The third group of scholars emerged in response to both the orthodox and

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  - 6 Please see Larson, D.W. (1985) *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) and Lagon, M.P. (1994) *The Reagan Doctrine: Sources of American Conduct in the Cold War's Last Chapter* (London: Praeger) for examples of scholars grappling with the role of individuals.
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  - 16 McAnulla, S. (2002) 'Structure and Agency', p. 281.
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  - 20 Hudson, V. (2005) 'Foreign Policy Analysis', pp. 1–30.
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## 2 The president, the presidency and US foreign policy

### Introduction

This chapter will attempt to analyse the role of presidential agency in the formulation of US foreign policy. The president is but one of many sources, both domestic and international, that determine the final outcome of US policy. This work is concerned with one particular aspect of US foreign policy, that of the role of the president. To determine the scope for presidential agency in US foreign policy, it is necessary to look at several key factors.

The first is the constitutional origins of the president's foreign policy role. This requires us to analyse the presidency as an institution and to locate its formal powers. One important relationship we will discern from this discussion is that of the president and Congress. The US constitution has created a government of separated institutions sharing power.<sup>1</sup> This has important ramifications for understanding the US foreign policy-making system.

The second factor is the development of the institution of the presidency over time. The constitution is a document open to interpretation and therefore debates over what the founding fathers intended are less important for understanding US foreign policy than how the institution of the presidency was 'operationalised' by successive presidents.<sup>2</sup> Particularly important will be the historical precedents set by Washington and Lincoln, as these laid the foundation for the birth of the 'modern presidency' during the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR).<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps more than any other institution of government, the institution of the presidency is shaped by the personal characteristics of the office holder. This book focuses on the management style of the president, how the president chooses to structure and manage the executive to facilitate decision-making.<sup>4</sup> This is the third factor influencing US foreign policy. The management style of the president in large part determines how decisions are made within the executive, and this in turn contributes to how effectively the president is able to direct foreign policy. A president who struggles to control his own White House may soon find himself faced with a crisis of his own making (directly as in the case of Watergate, or 'indirectly' as in the case of Iran–Contra, if one is willing to believe Reagan's defence of plausible deniability).



Once a decision is made in the White House, the president then faces the problem of implementation. In doing so he faces the harsh and complex reality of 'his' bureaucracy. We will see that it is not simply the case that the chief executive commands his executive departments and they obey his order. Each department has their own interests, loyalties and operating procedures, which can both help and hinder presidential initiative. How the president attempts to deal with this dilemma is of crucial importance to effective foreign policy-making. This also relates to the president's management style and how he decides to structure the executive. One key relationship this chapter will look at is that of the secretary of state and the national security advisor. How the president decides to utilise each of these generates important insights into the relationship between the White House and the executive departments.

Finally, the relationship between the president and Congress in the realm of foreign policy will be analysed. The most important insight to remember is that of Charles Jones, 'The presidency is not the government. Ours is not a presidential system'.<sup>5</sup> The president and Congress share the foreign policy-making power. The president is commander-in-chief, but only Congress can declare war. The president is responsible for international treaty-making, but these can only become law with the consent of the Senate. All presidential initiatives require funding, but it is Congress who controls the purse strings. Therefore, how the president attempts to work with Congress on foreign policy issues is of crucial importance.

What we shall see in the subsequent discussion is that it is difficult to separate these factors in reality. Interactions take place between each factor and it is the combination of these that influences final policy outcomes. The constitution defines the formal separation of powers and attempts to regulate how the branches of government should interact, but in practice we find that the relationship changes over time, with power moving from one branch to the other. In the realm of foreign policy this has more often than not been a one-way transfer from Congress to the president. This can result from external factors and the deference of Congress, but often is a direct result of presidential initiative.

It is important to make clear what this chapter does not argue. It does not claim that the president is in total control of foreign policy, and what he demands, the bureaucracy and Congress meekly accept. The president is part of a unique system of government whereby each institution is forced to share power with the other. The president may be the chief executive, but the bureaucracy is not his to command. However, within this system of competing sources of power it is possible to advance the argument that the presidency is in the strongest position to direct US foreign policy, both in theory and practice. This allows us to adopt an executive-centred view of the policy-making process from which we can try to determine how much scope there is for presidential agency.

## Constitutional origins

The constitution of the US is a compromise. In attempting to forge a new nation, the Founding Fathers shared several ideas in common. Chief among them was their belief that the purpose of any state was to protect individual liberty. They feared that unchecked government power would lead to tyranny and thus the destruction of liberty. Above all, the Founding Fathers rejected the notion of absolute monarchy. Agreement may have been reached as to the ends of government, but the key debate in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 was how this would be achieved. Eventually, a compromise was reached whereby a unique system of government was proposed. Each branch of government would be separated, with power shared among them, in the hope that each branch would be able to check and balance the other. This was due to the Founding Fathers' belief that an unchecked legislature or executive could lead to tyranny.<sup>6</sup>

The separation and sharing of foreign powers was also the result of a compromise. The convention had split into two camps over one major issue of foreign policy, the power of the executive. James Madison had argued strongly in favour of a system of separated powers. He believed that an overly powerful and overly centralised government would pose a threat to the liberty of the citizens. Wary of what he believed was the selfish and self-interested nature of human beings; it was therefore essential that any system of government must be based on strict rules that limited the potential for tyranny. As Madison wrote in *The Federalist Papers*, No. 51 'You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself'.<sup>7</sup>

Alexander Hamilton emerged as the leading voice for those who favoured a powerful executive. This developed from his belief in the need for a strong central government. Hamilton believed that a strong executive was absolutely essential for any system of government to function. He argued that executive leadership was required to promote good government. Writing in *Federalist No. 70*, Hamilton argued, 'A feeble executive implies a feeble execution of the government. A feeble execution is but another phrase for a bad execution; and a government ill executed, whatever it may be in theory, must be, in practice, a bad government'.<sup>8</sup>

The divergence of opinion between Madison and Hamilton sheds light on the final compromise laid out by the constitution. If a system of checks and balances was to be adopted, then a strong executive would be required to provide the initiative to make the system work. On paper it seemed as if Madison had triumphed, but Hamilton's insistence on a strong executive laid the seeds for future executive initiative.

Article II of the constitution establishes the powers of the presidency. The president is granted plenary power to be chief executive in both foreign and domestic policy ('The Executive Power shall be vested in a President' and 'he shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed'). The Constitution grants command of the armed forces to the president ('The President shall be

Commander in Chief of the Army and the Navy of the United States'). Finally, Article II designates the president as chief negotiator and chief diplomat ('He shall have power, by and with the advice of the Senate, to make treaties ... shall appoint Ambassadors ... and he shall receive Ambassadors and other public Ministers ...').<sup>9</sup> These constitutional delegations have generated competing interpretations of the president's role in foreign policy. Wittkopf *et al.* have argued, 'Clearly, the specific grants of constitutional authority are limited. The president has important opportunities, but not unambiguous authority to lead'.<sup>10</sup> This is challenged by McCormick, who notes, 'With such power at his disposal, the president seemingly possesses the constitutional mandate to dominate foreign affairs'.<sup>11</sup>

The Founding Fathers were concerned with placing too much power in the president's hands. To check and balance the power of the president, Article I of the Constitution entrusts Congress with the general legislative power ('all legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States'), which empowers it to make laws and appropriate funds ('no money shall be drawn from the Treasury but in consequence of appropriations made by law').<sup>12</sup> Wittkopf *et al.* have suggested that, 'Together, the general legislative power and the "power of the purse" grant Congress nearly limitless authority to affect the flow and form of foreign relations'.<sup>13</sup> The Constitution also designates specific foreign policy powers to Congress. Treaties must be ratified by the Senate. Congress alone has the right to declare war and provide for national defence (Congress is authorised to 'provide for the common defence ...; to declare War ...; to raise and support Armies ...; to provide and maintain a Navy). Congress is also entrusted with the authority to 'regulate commerce with foreign nations' and to 'make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper' for carrying out its other responsibilities.<sup>14</sup>

As with any legal document, the Constitution relies on interpretation. Scholars have long concerned themselves with the question of what the Founding Fathers intended, that is to say, in what way they wanted the government to function.<sup>15</sup> One of the major difficulties in attempting to address this question lies in the choice of language used by the framers. Article I clearly states that 'All legislative powers *herein granted* shall be invested in a Congress of the United States'.<sup>16</sup> Thus, although Congress is given sole legislative power, the Constitution places restrictions on this power in that Congress can *only* legislate in relation to those areas listed in the constitution. Article II, however, is much more ambiguous. It states, 'The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America'.<sup>17</sup> This statement fails to limit executive power in the manner of Article I. As a result, it is possible to argue that, 'Carried to its extreme, this view gives the president unlimited powers'.<sup>18</sup>

In the field of foreign policy, debate over the relationship between the president and Congress appeared to centre on war-making power. Disagreement again arose between Hamilton and Madison. The former argued in favour of strong presidential leadership in matters of war, but Madison sought to

temper this desire. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, Madison wrote, 'The constitution supposes, what the history of all governments demonstrates, that the executive is the branch most interested in war and most prone to it. It has accordingly with studied care vested the question of war in the legislature'.<sup>19</sup> The result of this compromise was that Congress was given the sole power to declare war, but the president was made commander-in-chief of the armed forces who would be fighting the war.

The reality of the constitutional ideal has led to conflicting views between the executive and the legislature as to where each branch's foreign policy-making authority begins and the other's ends. McCormick has noted, 'What has emerged, in the words of Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, has been 'a zone of twilight in which [the president] and Congress may have concurrent authority, or in which its distribution is uncertain'.<sup>20</sup> This uncertainty has produced a vast amount of literature centred on the debate over who should control American foreign policy. Scholars such as John Yoo, William Howell and Terry Moe argue in favour of a 'President-first' approach, whereas Louis Fisher and Louis Henkin reject this interpretation and argue for a strong congressional-based foreign policy.<sup>21</sup> The complexities of this literature are not of direct relevance to the current discussion. What is important, however, is that the constitution attempts to structure the presidency in relation to the Congress, but the ambiguity of the language involved has, as we shall now see, allowed individual presidents to shape the office to their particular preferences, and, in the field of foreign policy, presidents have been able to increase their power at the expense of the Congress.

### **The Constitution in practice**

As the first president of the US, George Washington played a central role in establishing foreign policy precedents for future presidents. By accepting the ambassador from the new French republic, and not the representative of the French monarchy, Washington declared that the president had the power to recognise foreign states, not Congress. Washington also successfully defended the power of executive privilege by refusing a request from the House of Representatives to see diplomatic papers relating to the Jay Treaty with Britain. He argued the House had no constitutional right to interfere in the treaty-making process.<sup>22</sup>

Future presidents would build on these precedents to increase presidential power at the expense of Congress. This was most notable in the area of military force. In response to the secession of the Southern states, Lincoln initiated sweeping and drastic actions. He ordered a blockade of the Southern ports, enlarged the army and navy, called the militia into service, arrested persons suspected of disloyalty and suspended the writ of habeas corpus. All of this was done without the authorisation of Congress and was thus unconstitutional. In terms of the reality he faced, however, the reasons for Lincoln taking these actions are understandable. The nation was faced with the

greatest crisis since the War of Independence. To save the Union, Lincoln was forced to take these drastic, extra-constitutional measures.<sup>23</sup>

Lincoln's actions are important to the present analysis for two reasons. The first is that his actions once again set a precedent. In times of national crisis the president may be required to encroach into areas of congressional responsibility to defend the nation. This is what presidents to this day continue to define as their most important constitutional role.<sup>24</sup> The second reason is that Lincoln offered a unique constitutional justification for his actions. He developed the Lockean idea of executive prerogative into a so called 'war power', which he believed resided constitutionally with the president. Locke had argued that prerogative power allowed governments 'to act according to discretion for the public good, without the prescription of the law, and sometimes even against it'.<sup>25</sup> For Lincoln, the war power of the president was based in the Take Care and Commander-in-Chief clauses. The former requires that as Chief Executive of the US it is the duty of the president to 'take care that the laws be faithfully executed'. The latter clause grants the president authority to command the armed forces. Lincoln fused these ideas together to justify his actions during the Civil War: 'When rebellion or invasion comes, the decision is to be made ... and I think the man whom, for the time, the people have, under the constitution, made the commander-in-chief of their army and navy, is the man who holds the power and bears the responsibility of making it'.<sup>26</sup> Lincoln had developed a new and expansive view of presidential power. He was clearly stating that in times of national crisis the president, as commander-in-chief, had constitutional authority to take whatever steps he deemed necessary to protect national security. Furthermore, this proclamation was accepted by the Congress in a special session, convened by Lincoln on 4 July 1861, 12 weeks after hostilities began. By 6 August, Congress had retroactively ratified all of Lincoln's military actions. The Supreme Court ruled in the *Prize Cases* of 1863 that Lincoln had the power to do this, even without a formal declaration of war from Congress.<sup>27</sup>

Although these precedents were set in the context of a civil war, the argument that the president, as commander-in-chief, has the right to initiate military action to defend the nation in times of crisis has important ramifications for the conduct of foreign policy. The majority of threats to national security will originate from foreign sources. Thus, future presidents would be able to draw on Lincoln's example when drafting national security policy. They could now make the claim that Congress has the power to declare war, but in the case of sudden attack it is the president who exercises power as commander-in-chief. Presidents Franklin Roosevelt during the Second World War, Harry Truman during the Korean War, Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam War, Richard Nixon during the Vietnam War and George W. Bush during the Iraq War have used this reasoning to justify their actions during major military engagements.

### **Accumulation of presidential power**

The purpose of the above discussion has been twofold. The first was to analyse specific examples of presidential agency in foreign policy. The second was to demonstrate that the foreign policy actions of individual presidents have contributed to a long-term trend that has pushed the presidency further and further to the centre of US foreign policy-making. What has happened, in essence, is an accumulation of executive power. Each president may have been responding to individual cases that were very much context specific (Washington and the Jay Treaty, Lincoln and the Civil War, Truman in Korea) but in doing so, each president established a precedent that future presidents were able to use both to justify their own actions and to further expand presidential agency in foreign policy (Johnson and Nixon, for example).

What has been witnessed over the past two centuries has been a gradual centralisation of war-making within the executive. The constitution clearly allocates the power to declare war to Congress, but as a result of growing American power and influence in world affairs, individual presidents have been able to increase their control of national security by emphasising their role as commander-in-chief, responsible for the security of the American people. This has allowed them to take command of the huge national security bureaucracy that has developed since the Second World War and, in doing so, has greatly added to the institutional strength of the presidency in relation to Congress. The modern presidency is thus granted advantages in foreign policy-making that Congress cannot match. This is not to say that it is simply the case that what the president commands instantly becomes official US foreign policy. It does, however, mean that the president is now well placed to take the lead in the formulation of foreign policy, which grants the president considerable scope for agency.

### **Congressional deference, delegation and opposition**

Between 1945 and 1972 Congress appeared, in general, willing to support the president's leadership in foreign policy. An era of bipartisanship developed where Congressmen and presidents tried to promote the view that 'politics stopped at the water's edge'. Senator J. William Fulbright, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 1959 to 1974, used an American football analogy to express his support of, and deference to, the president: 'No football team can expect to win with every man his own quarterback ... The Foreign Relations Committee is available to advise the President, but his is the primary responsibility.'<sup>28</sup> Aaron Wildavsky analysed the success rate of presidential proposals to Congress between 1948 and 1964. He found that the president had a 70% success rate in defence and foreign policy.<sup>29</sup>

Congress has not only deferred to the president on foreign policy. It has also delegated some of its constitutional powers to the president. On several occasions, Congress has authorised the president to use force as they see fit.

In January 1955 Congress granted President Eisenhower the power to use armed forces 'as he deems necessary' to defend Quemoy and Matsu from attack by Chinese communists.<sup>30</sup> In August 1964 Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which granted the president the right 'to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed forces, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty requesting assistance'.<sup>31</sup> This delegation of authority to initiate military force has resulted in Congress cementing the 'imperial presidency' by concentrating ever-increasing foreign policy powers in the executive.

The events of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal prompted Congress to reconsider its position in relation to the executive. Worried by what they believed were abuses of presidential power, Congress tried to become more active in foreign policy and to exert its constitutional responsibility to balance and check the presidency. They did so by targeting the use of executive agreements to bypass congressional oversight and the president's claim to an inherent war power.

By the early 1970s, Congress began to express concern over the breadth and depth of foreign commitments the president had entered into without Congress's knowledge through the use of executive agreements. The Case Act of 1972 ordered the president to submit all international agreements to Congress within 60 days of their execution. However, the act was limited and ineffective. The president still had the power to decide which agreements would be treaties and which would be executive agreements. If the president decided an agreement was too sensitive for public disclosure then the Case Act only contained provisions to forward the relevant details to the relevant Senate and House committees. As Wittkopf *et al.* have argued, 'the statute may have complicated presidents' lives, but it has not substantially restricted their freedom'.<sup>32</sup>

Turning their attention to the president's use of military force, Congress passed the War Powers Act in 1974. Many legislators were concerned the president had abused his position as commander-in-chief during the Vietnam War. The Constitution grants Congress the right to declare war. However, it has done so only five times in history.<sup>33</sup> In the same period, the US was involved in over 100 foreign conflicts. These were often defined by the president as 'police actions', 'limited conflicts' or any other term which fell short of 'war'. As a result of this semantic fluidity, the president did not have to ask Congress for authorisation. The War Powers Act was an attempt by Congress to place restrictions on the president's ability to deploy military forces abroad. Under the legislation, presidents must report to Congress within 48 hours the involvement of US troops in 'hostilities'. If Congress fails to authorise the president's decision, then all US forces must be removed from the combat zone within 90 days. The act also instructs the president to consult Congress 'in every possible way' in the run up to the use of force.<sup>34</sup>

The War Powers Act has been largely unsuccessful. Dumbrell has argued, 'The war powers legislation has conspicuously failed in its objective of giving Congress a controlling voice in crisis situations'.<sup>35</sup> Presidents have argued the act is unconstitutional. Richard Nixon stated it was an attempt 'to take away

by mere legislative act, authority which the President has properly exercised for almost 200 years'.<sup>36</sup> The vagueness of the language used in the act has been exploited by presidents. The act is unclear on who exactly the president should consult: the whole of Congress, the party leaders or the relevant foreign affairs committees? When asked if President Ford had consulted Congress about a rescue mission in Vietnam in 1975, Senator Hugh Scott of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee replied, 'We were informed. We were alerted. We were advised. We were notified ... I don't know whether that is consultation or not'.<sup>37</sup> The 90-day time limit was also an issue, Senator Eagleton noted at the time of passage that the war powers provisions effectively allow the president an 'open-ended blank check-book for ninety days of war making'.<sup>38</sup> Jacob K. Javits, the architect of the War Powers Act, argues that the resolution 'did not, and does not, guarantee the end of presidential war, but it does provide Congress with the means by which it can stop presidential war if it has the will to act'.<sup>39</sup> Congress has been reluctant to exert its will, however, especially if the president engages in short, victorious and politically popular conflicts such as Grenada, Panama and the First Gulf War. Congress is more likely to oppose domestically unpopular military interventions, such as Somalia during the Clinton administration.

### **The president as an individual**

Our discussion up to this point has focused on the constitutional origins of the presidency as an institution and how the actions of individual presidents have over time expanded the foreign policy powers of the office in relation to the other branches of government. What is now required is an analysis of the president as an individual in an attempt to establish what, if any, personal power sources are available to the president. We do so in the attempt to establish that who occupies the office of president has an important impact on the formulation and direction of US foreign policy. Each president brings to the office a unique combination of ideology, worldview, management style and political skill, and it is necessary to analyse these as important determinants of US foreign policy.

#### ***Informal powers***

One of the earliest attempts to draw attention to the president as an individual was Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power*.<sup>40</sup> He was concerned with the idea of the president as an individual amongst many in a set of institutions. Neustadt was responsible for emphasising that the US system was one of separated institutions *sharing* power. As a result of this, Neustadt made the rather revolutionary claim that the president may have been granted significant formal powers by the constitution, but these formal powers were almost negated by the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances. Thus the president found himself with limited opportunity to



exercise these powers in full, and that the office was reduced to that of a clerk. For Neustadt, the president cannot rely on his authority and mere commands to achieve results, instead the president must maximise his personal *informal* power. In doing so he will find that presidential power is in fact the power to persuade. To do so, a president must be able to demonstrate political skill to win the support of fellow policy-makers in Washington and the American people. More importantly, it is not about demonstrating skill in one particular instance, but being able to create a reputation that will maximise his personal power resources in all future instances. The problem for Neustadt, though, is very clear: 'Effective personal power is a risky thing – hard to consolidate, easy to dissipate, rarely assured'.<sup>41</sup> The overriding theme of his analysis therefore is one of presidential weakness.<sup>42</sup>

The rest of Neustadt's book focuses on trying to demonstrate how a president can maximise his personal power resources. He highlights the complex relationship between decision-making, producing and assessing quality-information, and timing. A president must be aware of how his current choices affect his future power resources. To do this he must be equipped with the required information and have enough time to analyse the information to make the decision. The president must also possess confidence in himself to make such decisions and he must be able to organise his staff and the executive in such a way to maximise his personal power resources.<sup>43</sup> This theme will be discussed in more detail in the next section, but for our purposes at the moment it is enough to acknowledge the contribution made by Neustadt in allowing us to locate the influence of the president as an individual.

### ***Presidential leadership***

The extent to which an individual can influence policy-making is often described in terms of leadership. The concept of leadership is complex in that it recognises differences exist between people in terms of their conception of interests and goals, and that to overcome these differences a leader must be able to exert influence to convince others to adopt his interests and goals, or to at least push others in a direction he requires for his goals to be attained. Greenstein has argued that for a president to exert successful leadership in a system of separated powers he must possess six qualities. First, he must be a skilled public communicator. Second, he must be able to organise his office to structure the activities of his aides effectively. We will discuss this in detail in the next section. Third, he must possess political skill to assert the powers of his office. Fourth, political skill must be harnessed to a vision of public policy that will provide both inspiration and a political strategy that will produce consistency in policy-making. Fifth is his cognitive style, how the president attempts to process the mass of information he must contend with in his role as president. Sixth, is the president's emotional intelligence. How the president is able to cope with the intensity and pressures generated by the office will, according to Greenstein, determine how effective he will be as a leader.<sup>44</sup>

However, even if a president is able to maximise his own personal skill set of leadership qualities, this does not guarantee him control over the policy-making process. Leadership does not exist in a vacuum. Like any other social activity it takes place within a historical context, and different contexts present individual presidents with varying degrees of freedom to exert their powers. Some presidents find themselves with many opportunities to lead, whereas others are more restricted. However, the argument at the heart of this study is that, although contextual factors may set the boundaries for political action, there is a strong potential for political agency. It is the combination of individual skill and contextual opportunities that determine whether a leader will be successful or not. It is the individual who decides whether they will take the opportunity or not. If the individual has the required skills, an opportunity to act, and the will to act, then they will have the maximum potential to achieve their goal. By acknowledging the fact that presidential agency is linked to context, we avoid the charge of psychological reductionism, but in stressing the potential of different individuals to exert leadership we also refute arguments in favour of historical and systemic determinism.

### **The president and the executive branch**

In the previous section we looked at the president as an individual to determine the extent of his personal and informal power. In doing so we identified that how a president chooses to organise the executive in large part determines to what extent he will be able to exert leadership. What we will see is that an important relationship exists between the president's individual style and the effective operation of the institution of the executive.

#### ***Presidential management style***

Upon inauguration, the president will quickly discover that the formal powers granted to him by the constitution do not on their own lead to him exerting control over the executive bureaucracy. The foreign policy bureaucracy is so large and complex that the president and his closest aides are responsible not just for initiating policy, but must also attempt to bring coherence throughout the executive branch to improve agenda setting, decision-making and implementation. However, each president brings his own blend of experience and preferences and thus each will approach the structuring of the office in a different way.

The first decision a president must make is to what extent he wishes to be involved in the foreign policy-making process. This is usually reflected in how he decides to structure the relationship between the Department of State and the White House. If the president wishes to take a less involved role in foreign policy, then he is likely to appoint an experienced secretary of state and charge him with directing foreign policy. However, if the president desires to involve himself in the business of foreign policy, it is likely he will chose to

centralise foreign policy within the White House. In the process he is likely to rely heavily on the National Security Council and grant his national security advisor wide authority in running US foreign policy, often at the expense of the State Department's involvement.

Alexander George has identified a key relationship between the president's personality and his management style: 'the incumbent's personality will shape the formal structure of the policymaking system that he creates around himself, and, even more, it will influence the ways in which he encourages and permits that formal structure to operate in practice'.<sup>45</sup> George has identified three personality variables that he believes directly influence the structure and operation of the executive. The first is the president's cognitive style, 'the way in which an executive such as the president defines his informational needs for purposes of making decisions'.<sup>46</sup> The second is the belief the president has in his own capabilities as they relate to management and decision-making. The third is the extent to which he is tolerant of conflict amongst his advisors. These three personality variables combine to determine which method of information gathering and decision-making the president prefers. The choice in essence is between a formal, hierarchical structure that focuses on teamwork and set routines, and a more debate orientated environment with less emphasis on hierarchy and more scope for idea generation. From this generalisation, George argues that there are three types of management style adopted by presidents.<sup>47</sup>

The first is the competitive model. This management style is usually adopted by a president who wishes to be heavily involved in the foreign policy process, has confidence in his abilities as a manager and decision-maker, and who wishes to encourage conflict amongst his advisors to maximise the amount of information that flows into his office. He wishes to encourage a diversity of views. To do this he will structure the executive to create overlapping jurisdictions and organizational ambiguity. In doing so, every policy discussion will require the input of various advisors, who will often be unaware that their jurisdiction has been encroached by another, and so each must compete to win the president's ear. The president will also engage himself at all levels of policy-making, often bypassing his aides in the White House to talk directly with lower placed administration officials and civil servants. In doing so the president hopes to increase his sources of information.<sup>48</sup> This was the management style adopted by FDR, and is held in high regard by Neustadt.<sup>49</sup>

The second is the formal model. Whereas the competitive model stresses disorder and conflict, the formal model brings structure and an emphasis on hierarchy to the decision-making process. The president attempts to reduce overlapping jurisdictions and organisational ambiguity by classifying each department and agency head as a functional expert on a specific aspect of foreign policy for which they are solely responsible for reporting to the president. What we find is that information passes up from the lower levels of bureaucracy to the agency head, who then presents this to the president. It is then the president's task to make a decision based on the information received. He does not encourage his agency heads to interact and he will very

rarely bypass his agency heads to discuss policy with lower officials. Often a president will employ a chief of staff to process information from the agency heads before it reaches the president. The formal model is usually adopted by a president who wishes to be less involved in the information gathering process, but who feels comfortable making the final decision. The formal model also tends to suit presidents who do not feel comfortable dealing with conflict amongst their advisors.<sup>50</sup> Richard Nixon is the most extreme example of this. Although he chose to be actively involved in foreign policy, he found the whole process of decision-making incredibly stressful. He also had a deep-seated psychological need to avoid conflict. Therefore he chose to centralise foreign policy in the White House but gave Henry Kissinger, his national security advisor, a prominent position in the foreign policy structure. Indeed George has argued, 'The foreign policy-making system that Kissinger, the special assistant for national security affairs, developed during the first year of Nixon's administration is generally regarded as by far the most centralised and highly structured model yet employed by any president'.<sup>51</sup>

The final type is the collegial model. Similar to the competitive model, the collegial model stresses the importance of diverse opinions and competition in the policy-making process. However, whereas the competitive model often leads to conflicts of interest based on jurisdictional parochialism, the collegial model attempts to encourage departmental heads to identify with the president's perspective. To do this the president will encourage close cooperation amongst the secretary of state and the national security advisor. Often special groups will be formed by the president to address a specific issue, with the group members being tasked to approach the problem not as representatives of a particular agency but as policy generalists who are open to the idea of cooperation and the sharing of ideas. The most widely known and successful example of this arrangement was President Kennedy and the executive committee he formed during the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>52</sup>

Each choice of management style has benefits and costs. The formal model brings structure to the office. It regulates the duties of the president's advisors and it provides well-established channels of communication. This helps improve coherence and allows the president time to make decisions in a well-ordered fashion. The downside is that clearly dividing tasks between well-regulated advisors can lead to a shortage of quality information reaching the president. By deliberately limiting the number of advisors he brings himself into contact with, the president may deprive himself of valuable sources of information. He may not be aware of the bureaucratic conflict or cooperation that has led to the information he has been presented with. Therefore when making decisions he may not have access to all the information he requires. The competitive and collegial management styles reverse this problem. By encouraging debate and involving the president heavily in the search for information, the competitive and collegial models have the potential to provide the president with much more information from a wider variety of sources. This, in theory, will improve the executive's chances of making a

quality decision. However, with the competitive model, the cost is to introduce parochial conflict and disorder into the executive. Instead of helping the president to see all sides of an issue, department heads will be tempted to use their bureaucratic muscle to present one-sided views that benefit their department at the expense of others. The collegial model attempts to overcome this by encouraging cooperation amongst the department heads whilst trying to get them to adopt a more general executive perspective. It is also clear that the competitive and collegial models place far greater demands on the president. For the competitive and collegial models to function effectively, they require an intelligent and highly active president who is willing to involve himself in the management of his executive. Finally, it must be noted that, like all social scientific models, these are abstractions from and simplifications of reality. In practice there will be a wide variety of management styles adopted by presidents and 'To some extent, elements of two or even all three models may be present in different mixes, with different emphases, in the policy-making system of each president'.<sup>53</sup> Presidents may also start off with one type of management style and progress to another.<sup>54</sup>

### *The president, the White House staff and the cabinet in foreign policy*

In attempting to control and direct the executive bureaucracy the president relies on two sources, the White House staff and the heads of the executive departments. In the area of foreign policy this relationship focuses on the role of the White House centred National Security Council, the Department of State, the Department of Defence and the intelligence community.

Each department in the bureaucracy is a vast institution with its own collection of interests, goals, preferences and operating procedures, which often conflict with presidential preferences. The president attempts to exert his control over these institutions by appointing the head of each department and tasking them with two functions. The first is to execute the statutory requirements of the department. The second is to act as the president's 'man on the inside', responsible for promoting White House policy and ensuring bureaucratic compliance with presidential demands. However, this system of management produces problems for both the president and the secretary. Cabinet heads find themselves in an unenviable position, caught between two competing sources of power. First, the president expects his secretary to be just that, to serve the president in his attempts to harness the energy of the bureaucratic department the secretary presides over. However, the secretary has a second function. He is the manager of a large bureaucratic staff. If he wants the staff to work for him, then he must be sensitive to their needs. As he provides a direct link to the president, the staff expect him to act as their representative in the White House. This places the cabinet head in an almost impossible position. If they are seen as being too close to the president then they will lose the support of their department, if they align themselves too closely with their department then the president will view them as having

'gone native' and thus become unreliable. It is difficult for a secretary to resolve these tensions, which limits the president's ability to rely on them for bureaucratic control.<sup>55</sup>

If the president does not feel that his departmental heads are contributing to successful management of the bureaucracy then he will likely decide to centralise policy-making within the White House. In doing so he will give greater power to the White House staff and sub-cabinet groups such as the National Security Council. The logic behind this choice is that White House staffers are not assigned in law the statutory functions that cabinet secretaries are. They should therefore have no divided loyalties and will be able to serve the president more effectively. Pika and Maltese argue that the 'Long term trend has been towards increasing reliance on a strong, sizable, centralised White House staff to protect the political interests of presidents, to act as their principal advisors, and to direct (as opposed to monitor and coordinate) the implementation of presidential priorities by the bureaucracy.'<sup>56</sup>

In foreign policy this cabinet/White House tension has played out in the relationship between the secretary of state and the national security advisor. Traditionally, the Department of State has been the principal agent of the US government responsible for foreign policy. As such, the secretary of state would occupy the highest position in the president's foreign affairs framework. Indeed, many presidents would charge their secretary of state with taking the lead in foreign policy-making. However, since the end of the Second World War, the Department of State has lost its position of prominence because of the creation of the National Security Council. Founded by the National Security Act of 1947, the National Security Council is responsible for advising the president with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign and military policies relating to US national security. Although the secretary of state is a member, the fact that the NSC is located within the Executive Office has led to an increase in importance of the national security advisor. Presidents who find it difficult working with what they often view as the anachronistic State Department, will tend to downgrade its importance while relying ever more on the NSC to coordinate policy. The earlier NSCs were simply managers of the executive branch's foreign policy operations. However, since Dean Rusk in the Kennedy administration, NSAs have played an ever-increasing role in the formulation of policy. As such they tend to establish a close relationship with the president, which in turn strengthens the position of the NSC in the foreign policy-making bureaucracy.<sup>57</sup> The most notable example is Henry Kissinger. President Nixon viewed foreign policy as his most important task and was determined to exercise tight White House control in this area. He appointed Kissinger as his NSA, centralised decision-making within the White House and tripled the NSC staff. Kissinger assumed control of the running of the NSC with the president restricting his own role to that of final decision-maker.<sup>58</sup> This reflected Nixon's own personal preference, as he greatly disliked face-to-face meetings and preferred to work alone in his office, making decisions on the basis of written reports.<sup>59</sup>

However, increased White House centralisation does not always lead to increased presidential control of foreign policy, or indeed to the creation of a successful policy. Increased centralisation demands greater presidential input in the process. The presidency of Ronald Reagan and the Iran–Contra affair serve as an example of what can happen if a president delegates too much authority to his foreign policy aides within a White House-centred system. This shall be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. The NSC system has also increased tensions between the State Department and the White House. This is especially true when the president employs an activist NSA such as Henry Kissinger. The NSA is also confronted with two conflicting roles, having to choose between limiting himself to a management position or actively engaging in policy formulation.

Whatever the benefits and costs associated with the NSC, it is clear that its creation and expansion has contributed to the strengthening of presidential leadership in US foreign policy-making.

### **The president and Congress**

In the previous discussion, we detailed how the executive has managed to expand its power in relation to Congress in the area of foreign policy. However, although the president may find himself in a more dominant position in relation to Congress, the American system is still one of separated powers. Congress still remains an important actor in the policy-making process. This section will focus on how the president attempts to work with Congress and under what circumstances he can expect his influence to be strongest.

There is a large body of literature centred on the issue of presidential-congressional relations. Broadly, it can be split into three categories. Those, such as Edwards, who argue that the separation of powers severely limits the ability of the president to influence Congress; those, such as Jones, who adopt a midway position, arguing that although the US does not have a presidential system, there is a distinct role to be played by the president at certain times; and a final group who argue that the expansion of presidential power has led to the emergence of an ‘executive hegemony’.<sup>60</sup> The purpose of this analysis is not to review this literature in substantial detail. Instead, working from this foundation, we wish to determine how the president attempts to ‘win over’ Congress to successfully implement his foreign policy agenda.

The first major hurdle any president must face is what is now commonly known as the ‘expectations gap’. Most lay observers of American politics do not fully comprehend the complexities of the system of checks and balances. Combined with a selective interpretation of history that tends to emphasise the achievements of the great presidents, many citizens expect the president to take charge of government and initiate the wholesale changes his supporters demand. The problem is that Congress stands in the way. The president may propose legislation, but it is Congress who decides whether to enact it or not.<sup>61</sup>

The president must also face up to the fact that Congress is not a unified institution, even if his party is in the majority. Each congressman and senator represents a constituency whose own interests, needs and preferences will usually be very different from the president's. With the threat of re-election constantly in their minds, congressmen will often be forced to support the local parochial needs of their constituents rather than addressing the president's national and foreign agenda. Although, in some cases, this can hamper the president's attempts at congressional leadership, in other cases it actually helps him. The parochial interests of congressmen limit their ability to present a unified front. This provides the executive with an institutional advantage that has proved conducive to leadership in foreign policy.

The task facing the president then is attempting to persuade individual lawmakers to get them to vote in favour of the executive's proposal. A large amount of a president's time is therefore spent trying to build coalitions of congressmen, often cutting across party lines, to secure the required majority for a bill to pass. To do this, the president has several methods at his disposal.

The most direct way the president can influence individual lawmakers is to grant them favours. These can take many forms, but the general idea is for the president to use his power and influence to benefit the lawmaker or his constituency. In return this generates leverage for the president that he can use in the lead up to important votes. The greatest resource the president has in this respect is his power of patronage. He can greatly influence the selection of a wide range of high-ranking government positions. Granting the right job to the right person in the right constituency can quickly win the support of lawmakers. The president can also influence the location of government construction projects which will bring benefits to the local community. Likewise, the president can threaten to withhold these resources to ensure the compliance of lawmakers.<sup>62</sup>

The president also has less direct methods of influencing Congress. He can appeal to the public and pressure groups to mobilise their support against Congress. The president uses this tactic in the hope that constituents will put pressure on their congressman and thus force them to support the president. However, such measures are not without risk. By going over the heads of congressmen, the president may incur longer-term hostility and more determined opposition.<sup>63</sup>

Pika and Maltese have argued that, in their dealings with Congress, presidents adopt one of three patterns of behaviour. The first and most predominant method is bargaining. This will involve granting or withholding favours, as discussed above, but presidents must be wary of indulging in this tactic too often as they have a limited amount of resources to distribute and the demand for these favours from Congress exceeds the supply.<sup>64</sup> The second method employed by presidents is that of 'arm-twisting'. Instead of the mutual cooperation of bargaining, arm-twisting involves 'intense, even extraordinary, pressure and threats'.<sup>65</sup> This tactic runs the risk of generating resentment and hostility, but 'judicious demonstration that sustained opposition or desertion by normal supporters will exact costs strengthens a president's bargaining position'.<sup>66</sup> The most extreme method the president can deploy is direct confrontation. This may involve



appealing to the public to pressure their congressman, but can range to the president challenging congressional authority or claiming presidential prerogative. A president will usually only adopt this as a last ditch short-run tactic as it will likely generate sustained congressional opposition if used too often.<sup>67</sup>

Having established what methods a president possesses in the legislative arena, we must now try to establish under what conditions he is likely to generate legislative support. In the realm of foreign policy it is quite clear that crises provide the president with the greatest opportunity to exert leadership. Under crisis conditions the president can usually expect to receive the support of the majority of Congress because the president enjoys institutional advantages to respond to crises that are lacking in Congress. Although domestic crises are comparably rare, the realm of foreign policy is more likely to produce national security crises thus strengthening the president's position in relation to Congress.<sup>68</sup> Presidents elected with a clear electoral mandate are also better placed to win over Congress than those whose winning electoral margin is smaller. George W. Bush serves as an excellent example of both these factors. Inaugurated after the highly controversial election of November 2000, winning the electoral vote but losing the popular vote, the first eight months of his presidency produced a mixed relationship with Congress as he struggled to promote his bold conservative agenda. However, the terrorist attacks of September 11 produced a crisis that transformed his presidency. Enlisting the support of Congress he had the Patriot Act passed and sent US forces to war in both Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>69</sup>

The nature of the opposition in Congress also largely impacts a president's ability to legislate successfully. The greater the number of seats held by the opposition party and the greater the strength of their ideological opposition, the more difficult a president will find it trying to promote his agenda.<sup>70</sup> However, a skilled president will be able to reduce the effectiveness of congressional opposition by engaging in well-executed coalition building. President Johnson was particularly noted for his political skill in the legislative arena.<sup>71</sup>

The final question we must address is how often the president is successful in his relationship with Congress. To answer this question we must engage with the literature mentioned at the start of this section. George Edwards has argued strongly that presidential leadership of Congress is typically at the margins, not the core, of policy-making.<sup>72</sup> The resources available to the president are limited and he struggles to expand them when required. He is unable to drastically change the political landscape and instead must rely on his ability to exploit opportunities in the political environment when they present themselves. By himself the president will be unable to alter public policy. As a result, Edwards argues that the president must be viewed as a facilitator in the coalition-building process rather than a dominant executive leader.<sup>73</sup>

Edwards is correct that the president operates in a system of separated powers. He has no constitutional authority to lead Congress anywhere they do not wish to go and cannot force them to legislate as he pleases. He is also correct to criticise those who place too much emphasis on the president as the

sole source of political change in American politics. However, all serious commentators on the presidential-congressional relationship are aware that it is just that, a relationship. Neither can govern without the other. What the opponents of Edwards argue is that he underestimates the role the president plays not just as a facilitator in the coalition-building process, but also as an initiator of policy, as the spark that starts the system moving. In a later analysis, Edwards and Barrett actually provide information to support this claim. They show that the president can almost always place significant legislation on the agenda of Congress, that the president generates about one-third of significant bills on the congressional agenda and that presidential initiatives are more likely to become law than congressional initiatives. Under united government, when the president's party controls Congress, the rate of successful presidential initiatives is nearly twice that under divided government.<sup>74</sup>

The methodology employed by Edwards has been criticised by Spitzer.<sup>75</sup> He argues that Edwards' studies are 'are limited in their scope and applicability. The focus on the specific concept of presidential success as measured by roll-call votes precludes the multiplicity of decision points where the two branches interact up to the roll-call vote – in other words, most of the realm in which the two branches interact'.<sup>76</sup> Spitzer argues that by classifying the president's role as 'marginal' Edwards manages to ignore two centuries of evolving institutional arrangements and political development which Skowronek has described as 'an evolutionary sequence culminating in the expanded powers and governing responsibilities of the "modern presidency"'.<sup>77</sup> It can be argued that 'marginal' and 'leader' are poles on a continuum and the influence of the president will be found somewhere in between. However, it is clear that the president has gradually acquired powers and responsibilities over a long period of time that pushes his influence closer to that of a leader than a marginal figure, but because of the separation and sharing of powers he will never be able to fully dominate Congress in the manner expected by the less informed members of the public.

In the area of foreign policy we have seen how the powers of the presidency have increased in relation to the Congress. Presidents have tried to minimise the involvement of Congress in foreign policy, particularly in the area of national security and defence policy, but it is impossible for any president to avoid dealing with Congress. Clearly if any president is to be successful in his relationship with Congress he must be willing to engage constructively with the legislature in the hope of securing their cooperation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the role of the president in US foreign policy. It has demonstrated that, from seemingly humble constitutional origins, the presidency has developed into the most important institution in US foreign policy-making. The constitution created a system of separated institutions sharing power, but over the course of two centuries the executive has

expanded its powers in relation to the Congress. As highlighted above, this was often the direct result of the specific actions of an individual president. It was argued that individual presidents often expanded the foreign policy powers of the office to achieve specific foreign policy objectives, but in doing so they set a precedent that over time produced a cumulative effect whereby more and more foreign policy power was centralised in the White House. The important point to note is that this chapter does not argue that the president is in sole command of US foreign policy. His powers are always defined in relation to the other branches of government as well as the bureaucracy, the American public and the international system. However, it has been demonstrated that of all the domestic sources of US foreign policy, the president finds himself in the most privileged position. Through the combination of factors discussed above it is clear that there is a large scope for presidential agency in US foreign policy. This chapter also serves a second purpose. It provides the domestic framework within which to analyse the case studies to be discussed in the following chapters. Having looked at the presidency in this chapter, we now turn our attention to analyse the roles Presidents Truman and Reagan played in the formulation of their administrations' foreign policy. In doing so we will look at the key factors outlined in this chapter: the constitutional standing of the presidency at the time of their inaugurations, the development of their worldview, their informal sources of power, their management of the executive bureaucracy, and their relationship with Congress.

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### **3 Truman's worldview and the origins of containment in Greece and Turkey**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter analyses the role of President Truman in the formulation of US foreign policy at the beginning of the Cold War. In particular, it argues that Truman's worldview played a crucial role in the development of the containment policy, which would stand as the cornerstone of US foreign policy from Truman's presidency until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The chapter proceeds in two sections. The first section focuses on Truman's worldview. It traces the evolution of his worldview from childhood through the defining moments of his adult life and determines the impact this had on policy-making during his presidency. It is argued that Truman entered the White House without a predetermined view of international politics, but his beliefs about the nature of man, society, war and peace allowed him to formulate a conceptual scheme for directing US foreign policy during his presidency. The second section outlines the development of the Truman Doctrine and the birth of the containment policy in response to the Greek and Turkey crises. Why did the US decide to intervene in Greece and Turkey? Why did this intervention take the form of an open-ended commitment to oppose authoritarianism? The chapter answers these questions by stressing the importance of Truman's worldview to the development of the doctrine that bears his name, and the wider containment policy that expanded from it. In doing so it makes the case for presidential agency as an important explanatory factor in the development of the Cold War.

#### **Historical context**

The US emerged from the Second World War as a true global power for the first time in its history. By September 1945 the US had the largest economy and the most technically advanced military in the world. The Soviet Union had managed to defeat Nazi Germany on the Eastern Front and had taken Berlin. In doing so, they had raised the largest conscription army in history. Six years of war in Europe had devastated the traditional great powers of the United Kingdom, France and Germany. These states would not retain their place as

great powers in the international system. Instead, the multi-polar system of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was replaced with a bipolar system populated by the new great powers: the US and Soviet Union. However, they were not equal powers. The Soviet Union's victory had been achieved at great cost. The German invasion of 1941 had inflicted severe damage to the Soviet people, their infrastructure and economy. The US homeland, separated from Europe and Asia by two oceans, had been spared the trauma of fighting a war on its own territory. As a result, it was domestically more stable and prosperous than the Soviet Union. The challenge the US faced was how it would deal with the post-war world and, in particular, the Soviet Union. The situation was complicated by the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was succeeded by his Vice President, Harry Truman, a man with little experience of foreign policy who was now charged with leading the US into a new era of foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

## **Truman's worldview**

### ***Origins***

Truman entered office with a worldview that had developed over the course of his life. He did not have a rigid, well-defined view of international politics and could not be considered an ideologue, determined to push US foreign policy in a specific direction with well-defined policy objectives. He also had little in the way of foreign policy experience, his professional political career having been spent working on domestic issues. It would be wrong, however, to describe Truman as a blank canvas in the area of foreign affairs. Over his lifetime he had developed several strongly held beliefs about the nature of man, society, war and peace, all of which would eventually help him to formulate a conceptual scheme for directing US foreign policy during his presidency.<sup>2</sup>

One important driving force shaping Truman's worldview was his knowledge of history. As a child, Truman had been diagnosed with a rare eye disorder that forced him to wear very thick glasses. His mother refused to let her son participate in sports with other children, fearful that the expensive glasses would break. As a result, Truman spent most of his childhood in the library. His favourite subject was history, and he particularly enjoyed reading the biographies of famous historical figures. These history books became incredibly important to Truman, helping him to develop a frame of moral reference that would remain with him all his life.<sup>3</sup> As he wrote in his memoirs, 'reading history to me was far more than a romantic adventure. It was solid instruction and wise teaching which I somehow felt I wanted and needed'.<sup>4</sup> Important for our study are two conclusions he drew from his studies. The first was his attempt to understand history. Truman subscribed to the 'great man' theory of history, believing that historical events can be explained by the actions of powerful leaders. This insight is important because it strongly influenced his conception of leadership:

I learned from it [history] that a leader is a man who has the ability to get other people to do what they don't want to do and like it. It takes a leader to put economic, military, and government forces to work so they will operate. I learned that in those periods of history when there was no leadership, society usually groped through dark ages of one degree or another. I saw that it takes men to make history, or there would be no history. History does not make the man.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, when Truman assumed the presidency, he brought to the office a very specific understanding of what was expected of him as president. It was his duty to act as the foreign policy leader of the US. To do so, Truman was aware that he would have to make difficult decisions in an increasingly complicated post-war foreign policy environment.<sup>6</sup> However, he believed that his knowledge of history provided him with the tools to help make these tough choices.<sup>7</sup> Truman believed, 'There's nothing new in human nature; only our names for things change'.<sup>8</sup> As a result of this, Truman operated on the assumption that lessons can be drawn from past events to help solve problems in the present: 'Ancient History is one of the most interesting of all studies. By it you find out why a lot of things happen today ... You will also find out that people did the same things, made the same mistakes, and followed the same trends as we do today'.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the course of his presidency, Truman would often attempt to draw parallels with historical events to provide him with guidance in selecting the appropriate course of action.<sup>10</sup> The academic assessment of Truman's use of history has tended to be rather negative. Most scholars agree that Truman had a rather weak and shallow understanding of history, and that he read historical biographies uncritically.<sup>11</sup> There was similar concern during his administration. George Elsey, Truman's Special Counsel and Administrative Assistant, recalled, 'I don't think his knowledge of European history was very deep; he had not paid too much attention to European history'.<sup>12</sup> These assessments are largely accurate. However, for the purpose of the current analysis, what is important is that Truman formulated his worldview on the basis of his knowledge of history, and drew lessons from the past to guide him in the present. This will help us to explain the development of his foreign policy.

One lesson Truman had drawn from the most recent past was the origins of the Second World War. He believed that the combination of authoritarianism and American isolationism resulted in the outbreak of global conflict. In 1943, while still a senator, he made the following remarks on the Senate floor:

A small group of wilful men kept us from assuming our world obligations in 1919–20, and the same thing can happen again. I am just as sure as I can be that this World War is the result of the 1919–20 isolationist attitude, and I am equally sure that another and a worse war will follow this one, unless the United Nations [UN] and their allies, and all the other



sovereign nations, decide to work together for peace as they are working together for victory.<sup>13</sup>

From the outset of his presidency, Truman made it clear that he wanted the US to play a larger role in international politics, particularly in attempts to 'win the peace'.<sup>14</sup> To do so, the relationship between the two remaining superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, would prove crucial.

### *Truman's view of the Soviet Union*

Truman held complicated views of the Soviet Union. He made it clear over the course of his administration that he did not give additional weight to the fact that the Soviet Union was a communist state. He characterised communism as merely a subset of authoritarianism, and did not think communism deserved special attention, or posed the largest threat to US security. For Truman, all dictatorships posed a threat to international peace and security. He believed the concentration of power in the hands of unaccountable leaders increased the chances of conflict. Truman would often write about and discuss views on this matter. In May 1945 he wrote in his diary, 'I've no faith in any totalitarian state be it Russian, German, Spanish, Argentinean, Dago, or Japanese...They all start with a wrong premise – that lies are justified and that the old, disproven Jesuit formula – the ends justifies the means is right and necessary to maintain the power of government'.<sup>15</sup> He made similar remarks publicly as late as 1947. Speaking informally to the Association of Radio News Analysts, Truman declared, 'There isn't any difference in totalitarian states ... Nazi, Communist or Fascist, or Franco, or anything else-they are all alike ... The police state is a police state; I don't care what you call it'.<sup>16</sup> These comments are important for our analysis because they demonstrate that Truman was not an ideologue. He was not an ardent anti-communist. Indeed, as John Lewis Gaddis has argued, 'a surviving tsarist Russia would have posed as much of a threat, in the eyes of Truman ... as a communist one'.<sup>17</sup> It was this faith in the positive attributes of liberal democracy and his abhorrence of authoritarianism, combined with the lessons he drew from history, which helped shape his worldview and allowed him to start conceptualising a foreign policy for the US to pursue in the years following the Second World War.

The main task facing Truman was to maintain world peace. To increase the chances of doing so, he knew that the US would have to establish a relationship with the Soviet Union. The difficulties facing Truman were in trying to decide what form this relationship should take, as well as trying to accurately interpret the underlying motivation of Soviet foreign policy.

The Soviet threat was conceptualised in two competing strands within the Truman Administration. The first group of policy-makers viewed the Soviet Union as a traditional great power which, like the US, was concerned with maximising power, influence and security within the existing international

system. They were concerned not with the internal workings of the Soviet state, but with the external behaviour. As a result, the Soviet Union could be treated just like any other great power and foreign policy could be directed along traditional diplomatic lines, with the possibility of cooperation remaining an option.<sup>18</sup>

The second group did not accept the view of their colleagues. They rejected the view that the Soviet Union was just another great power looking to secure its position within the international system. Instead, the Soviet Union was a revolutionary state that wished to overthrow the capitalist world order and replace it with worldwide communism. To explain the Soviet Union's foreign policy these analysts argued that US foreign policy must concern itself not just with calculations of power and interest, but also focus on ideology. A detailed understanding of the characteristics of the Soviet state was crucial to predict and counter Soviet foreign policy. These were the central ideas articulated by George Kennan in his infamous 'Long Telegram'. Kennan argued that Soviet foreign policy could be explained only in part by the 'traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity',<sup>19</sup> as the result of the Russian revolution of 1917 was to combine this insecurity with Marxist-Leninist ideology. Kennan believed 'there can be no permanent peaceful coexistence'<sup>20</sup> with a Soviet Union determined to pursue the ideals of worldwide communism. His grim conclusion was that Soviet foreign policy presented the US with 'undoubtedly [the] greatest task our diplomacy has ever faced and probably [the] greatest it will ever have to face'.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, there were two major weaknesses with Kennan's report. The first was that it did not offer any specific policy recommendations. The Soviet Union was identified as a threat, the idea of containing at selected points was developed, but there was a lack of solid proposals on which to build a coherent foreign policy. The second, and most crucial weakness, was that Kennan failed to distinguish between economic and military containment.<sup>22</sup>

In particular, although Kennan had been the leading voice arguing that the Soviet Union presented a new and dangerous threat, he maintained that the Soviet Union did not present a military threat. There would be no open warfare in Europe.<sup>23</sup> Such an outcome would prove too damaging to both the US and the Soviet Union for such an option to be considered. Instead, he wanted the US to pursue a policy of economic and political containment. The US would be responsible for providing economic assistance to Western European allies that they would use to secure their domestic political stability and to ward off any chance of a communist takeover.<sup>24</sup> However, others like Dean Acheson and the majority of Truman's foreign policy advisors viewed the Soviet Union as a potential military threat. The lack of clarity on this point created the possibility for hardliners to misinterpret his analysis and use his work to justify the development of a more overtly confrontational strategy based on the idea of the Soviet Union as a military threat.<sup>25</sup>

Truman found it difficult to subscribe wholly to the viewpoint of either group. Each side touched on values that he felt important. He opposed

authoritarianism, but he wanted peace, and he struggled to resolve these issues in the face of constant uncertainty regarding the motives of Soviet foreign policy. Therefore, perhaps unsurprisingly, he tried to find the middle ground between both views. His overriding concern was to avoid another war and he was prepared to cooperate with the Soviet Union to achieve this. He had learned the importance of Great Power cooperation as a result of his personal experience and reading of history. He had held this view since before assuming the presidency. As vice-president he had delivered a speech in 1944 stating, 'if we had kept together after the First World War – if we had taken common measures for the safety and security of the world – the [Second World War] need not have happened'.<sup>26</sup> As a result, Truman was prepared to continue Roosevelt's wartime policy of cooperating with the Soviet Union. However, Truman did not fully accept the view of the Soviet Union as a great power who shared similar great power interests with the US. Instead, Truman viewed the Soviet Union as somewhere in between a revolutionary state and a satiated great power. The Soviet Union was an authoritarian regime and would have to be treated firmly to secure cooperation and to enforce agreements. Daniel Yergin has argued that at this stage Truman had conceptualised the Soviet Union as a 'world bully', and that if the US was able to demonstrate enough resolve then 'the Soviet Union could be made to accept a subsidiary role in the post-war world'.<sup>27</sup> Truman knew that there would be many areas where the US and Soviet Union would disagree, but he was prepared to negotiate, even if it would be on US terms. In a meeting with Secretary of State Byrnes and US Ambassador to the Soviet Union W. Averell Harriman in April 1945, Truman said he understood that 'certain concessions in the give and take of negotiations would have to be made' and 'we could not, of course, expect to get 100 percent of what we wanted but ... on important matters ... we should be able to get 85 percent'.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, Truman's initial hope for cooperation with the Soviet Union did not last. Over the course of the first three years of Truman's presidency, a series of international developments, including the Iranian crisis, the blockade of Berlin and increasing Soviet involvement in Eastern Europe, began to shake Truman's faith in the possibility of cooperation with the Soviet Union. In a letter to Secretary of State Byrnes in January 1946 Truman noted, 'I'm tired of babying the Soviets'.<sup>29</sup> Scholars have tried to determine at what point Truman moved from his original relatively optimistic view of the Soviet Union to the more pessimistic view that would eventually characterise US–Soviet Union relations during the course of his presidency and throughout the Cold War.<sup>30</sup> However, for the purposes of the current analysis, it is not necessary to try and identify the exact moment at which Truman developed a Cold War mindset. Instead, the important observation is that Truman did not enter the Oval Office with a well-defined view of the Soviet Union and that it was his 'on the job' experience of dealing with the Soviet Union that shaped his view of them. This supports Greenstein's assertion that Truman was a reactionary rather than a visionary foreign policy president.<sup>31</sup> This is not to

say that Truman's view of the Soviet Union fluctuated back and forth over his time in office. There had been an initial shift from optimism to pessimism, but once Truman was convinced cooperation with the Soviet Union was no longer possible because of its aggressive foreign policy ambitions, this view remained constant for the rest of his presidency and shaped the development the policy of containment. Indeed, this view of a hostile Soviet Union began to pervade all aspects of US foreign policy to the extent that Truman and his advisors began to interpret all hostile foreign policy actions as having their origin in the Kremlin. These ideas will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter, with analysis of the role of Truman in the formulation of the Truman Doctrine.

### **The Truman Doctrine**

This section will analyse the role of Truman in formulating the Truman Doctrine. It begins with an overview of the situation facing US foreign policy makers in post-War Europe by focusing on the crisis prompted by events in Greece and Turkey. The reason for doing so is twofold. One, the birth of the Truman Doctrine represents a turning point in the history of US foreign policy, signalling a long-term strategic commitment to Western Europe. Two, it allows us to examine the role played by President Truman in its formulation. It will be shown that the US's decision to intervene was not inevitable, nor was the choice of policy. Instead, the birth of the Truman Doctrine allows us to investigate the importance of presidential worldview in US foreign policy. The key issue to stress is that Truman had choices to make, nothing was preordained. The US could have returned to isolationism, or restricted itself to simply funding Greece and Turkey. Why did Truman decide to enunciate a doctrine that committed the US to potentially long-term intervention outside of the Western Hemisphere for the first time in its history? Did the Truman Doctrine have to be framed in such terms? Answering these questions will allow us to show that presidential decision-making is central to explaining the development of US foreign policy at the outset of the Cold War.

### ***Greece and Turkey***

On 21 February 1947 the British government sent two aide-memoires to the Department of State explaining that as a result of the financial burdens placed on the United Kingdom by the cost of the Second World War, they would no longer be able to continue their assistance to Greece and Turkey in their struggle against domestic leftist uprisings. The British would remove their 40,000 troops as soon as possible and would end military aid to both states. According to the British, if Greece and Turkey were not able to find support from other sources then it was likely that both countries would fall under control of communist forces loyal to the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup>

The decision by the British to pull out of Greece and Turkey had several results. First, it signalled to US policy-makers that Britain was no longer the major power in Europe and the Middle East. Dean Acheson stated bluntly, 'The British are finished. They are through'.<sup>33</sup> Second, along with most of the policy-makers in Washington, Acheson interpreted the crisis in Greece and Turkey as a deliberate ploy by the Soviet Union to seize control of two strategically important European and Middle-Eastern countries.<sup>34</sup> The State Department had been monitoring the increasing political and economic instability in Greece for several months.<sup>35</sup> As a result, Acheson knew that with the British gone only the US could contain the Soviet Union in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>36</sup> Marshall assured the British Ambassador that the matter was of utmost importance and would be brought to the attention of President Truman as soon as possible.<sup>37</sup>

On 26 February, Secretary of State Marshall submitted a memorandum to President Truman that detailed the views of the secretaries of state, war and navy. All department heads were in agreement that the potential collapse of Greece into Soviet hands represented a direct threat to US security, and it was essential that the US send aid to support the Greek and Turkish government.<sup>38</sup> Truman knew that a decision was required. Acheson had presented a strong case that the US had to intervene. The crisis in Greece had been conceptualised as a deliberate ploy by the Soviet Union. They were attempting to gain a communist foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean. As discussed previously, Truman viewed the Soviet Union as a world bully, and what he believed to be their actions in Greece confirmed his preconception. Truman agreed with Acheson, but at this stage he was torn between several positions. On the one hand the situation in Greece presented Truman with an opportunity to increase the US's presence in the region. As demonstrated in the previous section, Truman held strong views that the US should use its power to promote peace and democracy. Truman believed he had learned from the experience of US isolationism in the 1930s that if the US refused to intervene in Europe then the potential for conflict would increase and threaten US interests and security. However, at the same time, he was restrained by two forces. One was his experience of war, both as a soldier in the First World War and as president during the Second World War. He did not want to see the US involved in open conflict with the Soviet Union. Second, he knew that Congress would not fund US military involvement in Greece.<sup>39</sup>

However, Truman was adamant that the US must do something to stop the Soviet Union. He was tired of what he saw as the Soviet bullying of Eastern Europe and did not want to see their influence spread further south and west.<sup>40</sup> Truman ordered a meeting of his highest ranking foreign policy team to take place the following day, and requested the attendance of the congressional leaders. The president was fully aware that any decision to involve the US in the affairs of Greece and Turkey would require the support of Congress and the US public. Congress controlled the purse strings and the fiscal conservatives dominating the institution would find it difficult to justify to their

constituents sending millions of their tax dollars to Greece and Turkey – two autocracies whose existence seemed to have very little in the way of US national interest.<sup>41</sup> By inviting the congressional leaders to attend the meeting, Truman was laying the groundwork for future efforts to secure the support of Congress for his foreign policy. In particular, Senator Vandenberg as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would be a powerful ally in the legislature if he could be convinced to support Truman.<sup>42</sup>

The meeting took place as scheduled on 27 February. Truman asked Secretary of State Marshall to set out the geostrategic implications of the Greek and Turkish crises for US policy in the region. Marshall explained, in rather dry terms, that the British pulling out of Greece and Turkey left these countries vulnerable to Soviet infiltration. He was clearly aware of the problem faced but was unable to convince the congressional leaders of the severity of the situation. Indeed, a State Department official present at the meeting described the congressional response as 'adverse', with the congressmen asking questions such as: 'Isn't this pulling British chestnuts out the fire?' and 'How much is this going to cost?'.<sup>43</sup>

Fearing that the Congressmen were not grasping the bigger picture, Acheson asked Marshall for permission to speak:

We have arrived at a situation which has not been paralleled since ancient history. A situation in which the world is dominated by two great powers. Not since Athens and Sparta, not since Rome and Carthage have we had such a polarization of power. It is thus not a question of pulling British chestnuts out of the fire. It is a question of the security of the United States. It is a question of whether two-thirds of the world and three-fourths of the world's territory is to be controlled by Communists.<sup>44</sup>

Acheson went beyond a purely material conception of geostrategic security by drawing the Congressional leaders' attentions to what he and Truman saw as the larger issues at stake:<sup>45</sup> 'the two great powers were divided by an unbridgeable ideological chasm. For us, democracy and individual liberty were basic; for them dictatorship and absolute conformity. And it was clear that the Soviet Union was aggressive and expanding'.<sup>46</sup>

The documentary record of this meeting details the shock expressed by the congressional leaders. Senator Vandenberg stated he was affected and shocked by what he had heard. He was prepared to support a programme of aid to support the governments in Greece and Turkey. However, he wanted specifics in terms of the design of the programme and the estimated costs.<sup>47</sup> Without these he would not be able to begin building support for the programme in Congress. Vandenberg also pointed out what Truman already knew, that the president needed to address the American people to set out the brevity of the situation in Greece, and the wider implications for US post-war foreign policy, in terms as stark as those that had been presented at the meeting. Greece and Turkey had convinced Truman that the Soviet Union was indeed

trying to bully the West. He told Vandenberg he would present the issue in its broadest sense.<sup>48, 49</sup>

The meeting had proved a success in terms of eliciting support from the congressional leaders. Within six days Vandenberg would write to his congressional colleague John B. Bennett:

I am frank in saying that I do not know the answers to the latest Greek challenge because I do not know all the facts ... But I sense enough of the facts to realise that the problem in Greece cannot be isolated by itself. On the contrary, it is probably symbolic of the world-wide ideological clash between Eastern Communism and Western Democracy, and it may easily be the thing which requires us to make some very fateful and far reaching decisions.<sup>50</sup>

Truman now had his high-ranking congressional foreign policy ally. Vandenberg would work hard over the following weeks to secure the required support in Congress, reporting directly to the highest ranking officials in the State Department.<sup>51</sup> With the growing support in Congress, Truman turned his attention to addressing the American people.

### ***The Truman Doctrine speech***

Truman did not personally draft the speech. This task was left to Dean Acheson in the State Department and Clark Clifford, Truman's White House counsel.<sup>52</sup> However, Truman had made it clear at the previous meetings that he wanted US involvement in Greece in order to stop the advance of communism. He wanted to promote peace and prosperity in Europe and he believed that for this to be achieved the US had to play a role. Those drafting the speech were aware of what the situation required and what the president wanted. On 7 March, Truman ordered a meeting of his cabinet to discuss the crises in Greece and Turkey. The minutes of this meeting provide documentary evidence to support the argument that Truman played a crucial role in the development of the Greek policy and what would eventually become known as the Truman Doctrine. At the meeting Truman stated the decision to ask Congress for \$250 million for Greece was 'only the first step' and he knew it meant the US 'going into European politics' and that it would require 'the greatest selling job ever facing a president'.<sup>53</sup> However, he concluded by saying, 'The job is to get the facts to the country to get the support necessary. We can't afford to revive the isolationists and wreck the United Nations'.<sup>54</sup> This demonstrates that Truman was intent on securing the US's position as a leading member of the United Nations, and he wanted the US involved in working to solve the problems faced by Europe. Therefore, although Truman knew his speech had to win over Congress, it was not just a cynical ploy to win votes for aid. By making this statement at a meeting of his cabinet, the president was clearly setting out his policy preferences, and his speech writers

were well aware of this. Thus, when they presented the president with the draft of the speech, it included the important ideas the president wished to enunciate to the American people, namely, that the speech should not focus solely on the situation in Greece and Turkey. For Truman, it was essential to make the American people aware that there was a much more important issue at stake, namely the national security of the US in the face of growing communist influence in Europe. If it had not, he would have had the speech redrafted until he was satisfied.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the idea that Truman was merely a passenger can be challenged. The president chose his staff, briefed them on what he wanted and they produced a speech he was happy with. This highlights the importance of President Truman in the formulation of the Truman Doctrine.

Truman delivered his speech before a Joint Session of Congress on 12 March 1947. Beginning by explaining that the 'gravity of the situation which confronts the world today necessitates my appearance before a joint session of the Congress',<sup>56</sup> Truman framed the issue of Greece and Turkey as part of a broader threat to the national security of the US and world peace. The specifics were laid out by Truman requesting \$400 million and civilian and military personnel to be sent to Greece and Turkey to help with reconstruction. However, the centrepiece of the speech was Truman's declaration that 'I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures'.<sup>57</sup> Truman's speech divided the world into two groups: free peoples led by representative and open governments, and peoples subjugated by a minority group through fear and coercion. The fall of Greece and Turkey would lead to a domino effect of the remaining free states falling under 'totalitarian'<sup>58</sup> dictatorship, with chaos and violence the inevitable result. Drawing on the lessons of history that were of such importance to the development of Truman's worldview, he explained that the US had invested \$341 billion dollars to win the Second World War and restore peace to Europe. Now the time had come for the US to spend one-tenth of that to secure their original investment. In doing so Truman explained that the US would be 'giving effect to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations'.<sup>59</sup> This speech is important not only because it set the broad contours of US foreign policy for the proceeding four decades, but also because it highlights the importance of Truman's worldview in its formulation. The use of 'totalitarian' demonstrates Truman's belief that all dictatorships, communist or otherwise, are potential threats to world peace, and Truman's faith in the United Nations highlights the idealistic streak that permeated his view of the world. These ideas were incorporated into the speech by Truman and directly link back to the argument presented in the first section outlining the development of Truman's worldview and its importance in helping to shape post-war US foreign policy.

Truman's two pronged strategy proved successful. On 9 May, the Greek-Turkish aid bill was passed by 287–107 votes in the House of Representatives and by 67–23 votes in the Senate.<sup>60</sup> President Truman signed the bill into law



on 22 May.<sup>61</sup> The decision to target Vandenberg and use him as a figurehead for the administration's legislative strategy to win the votes of Republican fiscal conservative Congressmen was important. Senator Vandenberg would later describe the passage of the aid bill as a triumph of 'unpartisan' foreign policy-making. However, historians would point to the important role played by Truman and his speech to Congress.<sup>62</sup> As Leffler has argued, 'By seizing the initiative, utilizing ideological language, embarking on a crusade, and placing the prestige of the presidency and the country at risk over the issue of aid to Greece and Turkey, he [Truman] elicited support from a wary Congress'.<sup>63</sup>

It must be restated that Truman was not an idealist. As discussed in the previous section, he had long-term goals that he wished to pursue: world peace, strengthening the United Nations, spreading democracy and promoting free market capitalism. However, he was aware of the strategic realities facing his attempts to push US foreign policy into a larger world role, and was reminded regularly in his meetings and by the briefing papers he read.<sup>64</sup> Greece and Turkey were conceptualised as a crucial barrier in stopping the spread of communism into Europe. However, this was not purely an ideological battle of communism versus democracy, of free peoples versus totalitarianism. Instead, underlying the ideological dimension was an understanding of the strategic importance of Greece and Turkey: access to the Eastern Mediterranean and the oil supplies of the Middle East.<sup>65</sup> Truman was well aware of the US's need to secure the balance of power in the region.<sup>66</sup> Replying to Eleanor Roosevelt's objections to the US 'taking over Mr Churchill's policies in the Near East, in the name of democracy' Truman wrote:

I would argue that if the Greek-Turkish land bridge between the continents is one point at which our democratic forces can stop the advance of Communism that has flowed steadily through the Baltic countries, Poland Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria, to some extent Hungary, then this is the place to do it, regardless of whether or not the terrain is good.<sup>67</sup>

This demonstrates that Truman was working to shape US policy on the basis of both idealistic and geostrategic considerations. Truman was interpreting Soviet actions as confirmation of his pre-held beliefs about the nature of totalitarian regimes and using this to justify the development of US foreign policy in light of the Greek and Turkish crises.

President Truman wanted to increase the involvement of the US in international politics in order to protect US security, stop communism advancing beyond Eastern Europe and spread democracy by supporting 'free peoples'.<sup>68</sup> However, Truman was unable to see the long-term consequences of his actions. The first unintended consequence was the creation of a long-term strategic commitment to contain the Soviet Union on a global scale. As

Gaddis has argued, 'By presenting aid to Greece and Turkey in terms of an ideological conflict between two ways of life, Washington officials encouraged a simplistic view of the Cold War which was, in time, to imprison American diplomacy in an ideological straightjacket almost as confining as that which restricted Soviet foreign policy'.<sup>69</sup> The second unintended consequence was to inadvertently push the US away from foreign economic assistance. What began as a seemingly simple transfer of aid to Greece to prop up an allied regime was in fact the first step on the journey towards the development of a militarised form of containment. As Leffler has argued, 'The ideological fervour... was important: by defining the enemy as inveterately hostile, it eliminated the prospect for compromise and accommodation; it also helped bring former isolationists into the interventionist camp, thereby creating the climate for yet additional measures'.<sup>70</sup> These additional measures included increasing US commitments abroad, and, as a result of the president's desire to protect the United Nations, involvement in the Korean War. This will form the heart of the case study in the following chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the development and application of Truman's worldview to the formulation of US foreign policy during the early stages of the Cold War. It has argued that Truman's worldview played a central role in the birth of the containment policy, one that is often undervalued by scholars. Truman initially hoped to cooperate with the Soviet Union, but with a distrust of authoritarian regimes, Truman began to perceive Soviet actions in Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean as hostile towards the US and its interests in the region. Whatever optimism Truman may have held at the end of the Second World War, it soon gave way to the acceptance of the Cold War mindset which interpreted all foreign policy crises as somehow having their origins in the Kremlin's plan for world domination. The ease with which the domino theory was accepted by Truman and his development of the Truman Doctrine in response to the crises in Greece and Turkey is evidence of this. Truman believed the events in Turkey and Greece were part of a larger communist project engineered by the Soviet Union and he directed US foreign policy accordingly. What began as economic aid to two European countries escalated to a military commitment to the whole of Western Europe and, as will be analysed in the following chapter, East Asia. President Truman's worldview played a significant role in this outcome by filtering the incoming information the president received. As predicted by the worldview literature, this filtering of information had an impact on Truman's decision-making. By adopting the Cold War mindset and interpreting all hostile foreign actions as the work of the Kremlin, Truman was unable to stand back and analyse possible alternative interpretations and outcomes. Events were no longer looked at in isolation. Truman believed Greek and Turkish politics were being manipulated by Moscow (thus beginning the trend among US

foreign policy-makers of interpreting politics in foreign countries in light of the Cold War and minimising the role of domestic factors). The information filter provided by Truman's worldview led the president to actively engage the US in opposing authoritarianism by enunciating the Truman Doctrine.

The conditions in post-war Europe were important in increasing the likelihood of some form of US intervention. However, if a president with a worldview different to Truman's had been in office there is an argument to be made that US intervention may not have happened so soon, or taken the shape of an open-ended commitment to oppose authoritarianism and communism. If FDR had lived longer, there may have been less hostility and more compromises. Instead, President Truman developed the containment policy and, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, played a crucial role in its expansion and militarisation. This demonstrates the important role played by presidential worldview in the formulation of US foreign policy. This chapter also provides evidence to support the central argument of this book. Only by incorporating agency into a multi-level framework is it possible to offer such a detailed explanation of US foreign policy at the outset of the Cold War. Structural theories alone would not be able to explain the development of the Truman Doctrine and containment policy. Analysing the role of presidential agency in relation to domestic and international structures allows us to do so.

## Notes

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- 5 Truman, H.S. (1955) *Memoirs: Year of Decision*, pp. 119–120.
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- 8 Hersey, J. (1980) *Aspects of the Presidency* (New York: Ticknor and Fields) p. 45.
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- 49 For further documentary evidence of the meeting, please see *Foreign Relations of the United States* (1947) Volume 5, pp. 56-68, 63, 94.
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## **4 Truman's management style and the Korean War**

### **Introduction**

This chapter analyses the development of Truman's management style and its application to policy-making during the Korean War. The first section details Truman's management system and his attempts to organise his executive. It argues that Truman developed a formal management system based on his individual preferences, which had developed during his time in the army and US Senate. It demonstrates how important personal relationships were to the functioning of Truman's presidency by focusing on the president's relationships with his secretaries of state. The second section takes the form of a case study of the Korean War. It addresses several questions. Why did the US intervene in Korea? Why did they deploy ground troops? Why did the US decide to cross the 38th parallel and invade North Korea? Why did the US advance north to the border with China and prompt Chinese intervention? The central argument presented is that both Truman's choice of management structure and how he operated within this system are central to answering these questions and understanding the debacle of US intervention in the Korean War.

### **Truman's management style**

As discussed in the previous chapter analysing the development and operationalising of Truman's worldview, President Truman entered office with little experience of both executive politics and foreign policy. However, Truman had extensive experience of congressional committee work from his time as senator from Missouri. The following section will demonstrate how Truman applied this experience to the functioning of the White House. In particular it will focus on how Truman sought to overhaul what he viewed as his predecessor's lack of formal organisation of the executive and his attempts to bring structure and hierarchy back to the functioning of the executive through the development of a formal management style.

### ***Formalism***

Adopting the typology developed by Johnson and discussed in the previous chapter, it is clear that Truman operated a formal management style. This approach to management had been established long before Truman entered the White House. From his time as an artillery officer on the Western Front during the First World War, Truman learned the importance of hierarchy, routine, the assignment of specific tasks, clear lines of jurisdiction and, most importantly of all, loyalty. In the heat of battle it was essential to meet challenges directly and, as an officer, to make decisions that would achieve military objectives. These decisions risked the lives of his men. Truman relied on his men to follow his orders. If they did, he would give them his full support. As Johnson has stated, 'This formula of reciprocal loyalty was to become a Truman trademark'.<sup>1</sup> Truman carried his conception of loyalty into the White House, where it formed a cornerstone of his management style and, as will be discussed later, largely determined the extent to which the president was able to establish productive working relationships with his advisors.

The second most important influence on the development of Truman's management style was his experience of working in the Senate for ten years between 1935 and 1945. Instead of attempting to increase his public persona through speechmaking on the Senate floor, Truman preferred to work hard on less public assignments and developed a talent for committee work. In 1936 he volunteered to investigate the financial crisis facing America's railroads. Truman believed the near bankruptcy of so many railroads was the result of corruption. As his investigation delved deeper into the industry, Truman was soon faced with a wave of organised interests attempting to shut down his investigation. In the face of adversity Truman refused to back down, supported the work of his investigators, and was eventually able to prove that several railroads had engaged in criminal financial activities.<sup>2</sup>

Truman's management style was cemented as a result of his experience leading the Truman Committee's investigation into the inefficient use of government funds during the Second World War. Truman chose men he could trust to sit on the committee with him. He selected investigators he believed to have the required abilities. Truman instructed his men to find the facts and present them to the committee. As chairman, he demanded his fellow committee members agree unanimously on all decisions made, and all reports were to be signed off by the full committee. This often required multiple drafts of reports until all committee members were in agreement.<sup>3</sup> Truman tried to explain his desire for unanimity, stating 'Reasonable men don't differ much when they have the facts'.<sup>4</sup> The combination of the correct choice of staff, the delegation of tasks and the hard headed desire of Truman as chairman to attain all the facts resulted in a hugely successful investigation. Uncovering a vast array of fraud, corruption and inefficiency, the Truman Committee forced institutional reorganisation by recommending the War Production Board replace the Office of Production Management.<sup>5</sup> Over the



course of the war it has been estimated that Truman and his committee saved the US government \$15 billion.<sup>6</sup>

This discussion is important because it analyses the development of Truman's management style. From the preceding section we can trace the evolution of several important traits of the management style adopted by Truman as president, most notably, the creation of a staffing system that was based on clear delegation of tasks and Truman's insistence on loyalty.

Having not studied at university, Truman felt he lacked the intellectual capabilities and educational background of many of his colleagues. He commented on it regularly during his senatorial career and time as president: 'I wish I had a college education. I might have accomplished something better. I feel a terrible inadequacy of education'.<sup>7</sup> These feelings of inadequacy were important in shaping the management style he adopted as president. Aware of his own limitations, Truman tried to overcome these by relying on the expertise of others. He would identify the area in which he lacked information, appoint relevant experts and make decisions based on their advice. This was the heart of the Truman management style. He told his Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, after only a few weeks as president, that 'he knew he didn't have much in the way of brains but that he did have enough brains to get hold of people who were able and give them a chance to carry responsibility'.<sup>8</sup> However, Truman made it clear that 'I shall always be president and make the final decision in matters of major policy after they give me their facts and recommendations'.<sup>9</sup>

There is disagreement in the literature over the extent to which Truman delegated and how well he kept track of those to whom he delegated. Larson argues that Truman was not particularly concerned about details, that he 'preferred to let others handle particulars, leaving him free to concentrate on the broad issues'.<sup>10</sup> However, Neustadt disagrees with this conclusion. He argues that Truman should not be thought of as ignorant of substantive details. Indeed, Neustadt points to the fact that Truman was 'proud to take apart a budget'.<sup>11</sup> The latter is supported by the testimony of staffers who worked with Truman during his presidency. John Hersey, a journalist, was granted privileged access to Truman and his administration for three months in 1950. During this time members of the administration commented on Truman's attention to detail, particularly his ability to absorb information and recall it months later.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the conclusion to be drawn is that, although not academically gifted, Truman worked hard to keep himself informed on the development of policies as best he could.

### *Truman in the White House*

Truman had witnessed Roosevelt's competitive style of management and did not want to replicate it in his administration.<sup>13</sup> Instead, Truman tried to bring order to the process by setting out clear lines of authority and jurisdiction for his staff members. He did this in two ways. The first was through institutional

reorganisation. With the passing of the National Security Acts of 1947, Truman established the National Security Council. Instead of the free-wheeling and ad hoc system advocated by Roosevelt, with different advisors responsible for different tasks at different times, Truman brought into place a staff machinery within the White House directed solely at producing policy advice on the subject of national security.<sup>14</sup> The second was to address the bureaucratic battles that were the legacy of Roosevelt's system. As Greenstein has argued, Roosevelt 'put a premium on wile, making the influence of his advisors a function of their bureaucratic skills rather than the merits of their recommendations'.<sup>15</sup> To counter this, Truman sought to increase the control of each cabinet member over their respective department by delegating presidential authority to them.<sup>16</sup> For this system to work efficiently, Truman would have to establish solid working relationships with his department secretaries. To do this, Truman enforced regularity in his schedule. He was briefed daily by his secretary of the National Security Council and held weekly meetings with the secretaries of state and defence, the NSC and his cabinet.<sup>17</sup>

A letter from President Truman to his Vice-President, Alben W. Barkley, written in July 1950 provided direct instructions from the president as to how he wished his foreign policy system to operate. In the letter the president states that he wants the National Security Council to become the central decision-making body on all matters relating to national security. Truman wrote, 'It is my desire that all such policies should be recommended to me through the Council in order that I may readily have the collective benefit of the collective views of the officials of the Government primarily concerned with the national security'.<sup>18</sup> The president explained that this could only be achieved if regular meetings were held 'at which the responsible officials may freely discuss specific recommendations on which there has previously been coordinated staff work'.<sup>19</sup> Concerned that previous meetings had been too large and stifled discussion, Truman ordered that only the statutory members of the NSC could attend and that 'Participation by other officials will only be with my specific approval'.<sup>20</sup> Truman concluded his letter by saying, 'To be effective these meetings should be preceded by carefully coordinated staff work by the best qualified individuals who can be made available for the task'.<sup>21</sup>

This letter is important because it provides documented primary evidence from the President himself detailing how he wished national security policy to be conducted. Truman used the very phrases that were established as the key tenets of his system in the previous analysis. Truman placed great emphasis on the need for coordinated and careful staff work, tasks would be assigned based on the functional expertise of the staff member, clear lines of authority were drawn by only allowing the statutory members, the department heads, to participate in the NSC meetings, and a strict hierarchy was enforced with President Truman sitting on top making decisions based on the information flowing up from below. This document demonstrates that Truman played a central role in organising decision-making structures within the White House and wider executive. The formal style was how he wanted foreign policy to be

run. It was a carefully designed system, drawing on Truman's previous experience, that he worked hard to implement and maintain during his tenure as president.

How Truman wanted his executive to be run and how it actually was run are obviously two different things. Therefore, to move beyond the president's wishes to a more balanced assessment, it is necessary draw on the opinions of those officials who worked in Truman's executive and who are able to provide important primary evidence into the workings of the Truman White House and executive. One important source is those members of staff who had worked for Truman's predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt, and are able to offer a comparison of each president's management style. Secretary of War Henry Stimson noted, 'it was a wonderful relief to preceding conferences with our former Chief to see the promptness and snappiness with which Truman took up each matter and decided it', and that 'There were no long drawn out "soliloquies" from the President, and the whole conference was thoroughly businesslike so that we actually covered two or three more matters than we had expected to discuss'.<sup>22</sup> It can be argued that Truman's proclivity for quick decision-making stemmed from his personal feelings of intellectual inadequacy in the face of those he thought of as better educated. As Larson has argued, 'He knew that Roosevelt's former advisors could not look at him without making unflattering comparisons to their great leader. Making decisions quickly was a means of providing to Washington officials that *he* was in charge and in command of events'.<sup>23</sup> However, Truman does seem to have been successful in removing the confusion of the Roosevelt system and developing clear lines of jurisdiction and authority. As Assistant to the President John Steelman noted to a contemporary, 'I've almost never come across a case in which the President gave me something to do which, or even part of which, he had given to someone else'.<sup>24</sup> To his contemporaries, therefore, Truman was successful in overhauling the competitive system of Roosevelt. However, as will be discussed in the case study, the formal system has its strengths, but it does not guarantee effective policy-making. The role of Truman within the system would prove crucial to its success or failure.

### ***Personal relationships***

For a formal management system to operate smoothly it is essential that staff members are fully aware of their place in the system, which tasks they are expected to complete, which jurisdictions they are responsible for operating within, and their relationship with the president. Therefore, the president must be satisfied that the staff working under him are qualified for the position they hold and be confident that the required information will flow up to him through the predetermined channels. The president must be able to establish working relationships with his staff to ensure quality decision-making. The correct type of person must be employed and the president must make it clear to them how he wants them to work and what is expected of them in their role.

This was especially the case with President Truman. As discussed previously, Truman's preferred operating style was for strict formalism, with clearly established lines of authority and jurisdiction. The president would sit at the top of the formal system and make decisions on the basis of information flowing up to his office from the lower echelons. As a result, the secretary of state was designated as the president's highest-ranking foreign policy official. Truman expected the State Department to act as the institution primarily responsible for drafting US foreign policy, and the secretary of state would be the president's chief foreign policy advisor.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the relationship between President Truman and his secretary of state would be crucial in the formulation of US foreign policy during the Truman administration. This section will look at each of Truman's three secretaries of state to establish that personal relationships were an important determinant in the ability of Truman to work successfully with each secretary.

### *Byrnes*

James Byrnes's tenure as secretary of state demonstrates the importance of personal relationships in determining the success of working with President Truman. As director of the Office of Economic Stabilisation and head of the Office of War Mobilization, Byrnes had been one of the most influential administration figures during Roosevelt's presidency. Appointed secretary of state by Truman on 4 July 1945, Byrnes was expected to become one of Truman's closest advisors, having previously mentored Truman during his time in the Senate.<sup>26</sup> On the surface, all the ingredients were present for a successful working relationship with the President. However, over the course of Byrnes' eighteen months in office several serious problems emerged.

As discussed previously, Truman valued loyalty and placed great emphasis on the need for his subordinates to brief him fully on policy development. Truman had granted the State Department institutional primacy in the formulation of US foreign policy and expected Byrnes to report regularly, and in detail, to the president. Time and again the secretary appeared, in Truman's eyes, incapable of fulfilling this duty. The most notable example happened as early as December 1945, when Byrnes took part in the interim meeting of foreign ministers at the Moscow Conference. Truman was unhappy with Byrnes' performance for several reasons. In terms of the substance of agreements reached between the foreign ministers, Truman felt Byrnes had accepted too many concessions in relation to international atomic cooperation and Soviet influence in Iran. However, more importantly for the president, Truman believed that Byrnes had failed to keep him informed of daily developments and was outraged that his secretary of state released the communiqué of the conference to the public before sending it to the president.<sup>27</sup> For Truman, this was a clear dereliction of the secretary of state's role. On Byrnes' return to Washington, Truman sent him a letter explaining why he was upset:

I have been considering some of our difficulties. As you know I would like to pursue a policy of delegating authority to the members of the cabinet in their various fields and then back them up in the results. But in doing that and in carrying out that policy I do not intend to turn over the complete authority of the President nor to forgo the President's prerogative to make the final decision. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that the President should be kept fully informed on what is taking place. This is vitally necessary when negotiations are taking place in a foreign capital, or even in another city than Washington. This procedure is necessary in domestic affairs and it is vital in foreign affairs.<sup>28</sup>

This letter is important because it details in the president's own words the standards he expects of his secretary of state. Truman stresses the importance of procedure because it is essential for the successful operation of his formal style of management. Truman also makes it clear that Byrnes does not have complete authority to make US foreign policy on his own. This remains the president's prerogative. Truman concludes by saying he has 'the utmost confidence in you and in your ability but there should be a complete understanding between us on procedure. Hence this memorandum'.<sup>29</sup> Truman still believed Byrnes was the right man for the job, but he wanted him to try harder to fit into the president's system. Unfortunately for Truman, during the course of 1946 this failed to happen. Byrnes' continued to operate in his independent style, relied on a few close advisors and neglected his managerial role as secretary of state by failing to organise the State Department.<sup>30</sup> Unable to resolve the differences in their operating styles, Truman asked Byrnes to resign on 21 January 1947.

### *Marshall*

Truman was able to establish a more productive working relationship with Byrnes' successor, George Marshall, and his final secretary of state, Dean Acheson. The success was based on three factors. First of all, each was able to establish a personal relationship with President Truman, although each was based on different qualities. Secondly, each secretary was able to adapt to and effectively operate within the formal and hierarchical management style of Truman. Finally, each secretary knew what the president expected of them in their role in a way that Byrnes did not. Truman thus felt confident to grant each man increasing prominence as bureaucratic players within US foreign policy institutional arrangements.

Truman appointed George Marshall as secretary of state on 21 January 1947. Marshall entered office with impressive credentials. He was the first general promoted to five-star rank and served as chief-of-staff of the United States Army during the Second World War, and was instrumental in planning the successful allied invasion of Europe in 1944. Alonzo Hamby has said of the general, 'Marshall generated more reverence than anyone in American

life', and this was reflected in the popular media, with Marshall being voted *TIME* magazine's 'Man of the Year' in 1943 and 1947.<sup>31</sup> As discussed previously, Truman often felt deference to those he considered his betters, and perhaps unsurprisingly as an ex-army officer himself, he held Marshall in particularly high esteem. When asked which American had made the greatest contribution of the previous 30 years, Truman had no hesitation in naming George Marshall.<sup>32</sup> It was from this foundation of respect that Truman and Marshall were able to form the basis of their working relationship.

Marshall brought specific talents to the office. His entire working life had been spent in the army, thus he found it easy to work within Truman's formal system, with its emphasis on hierarchy and strict demarcation of roles. Marshall knew he was the secretary of state and did not think he had a free hand in foreign policy, as Byrnes had seemed to believe at times.<sup>33</sup> Thus he would follow the president's instructions and only work with the power that Truman delegated. The combination of presidential confidence and domestic popularity created the basis for a strong and successful secretary of state.

However, having previously been army chief-of-staff, Marshall knew that he could not accomplish his job without a well-organised bureaucracy operating below him. His predecessor did not share this view and had neglected his role as manager of the State Department.<sup>34</sup> Marshall was a commander, 'interested in duty, order and sound administration', and he instigated an overhaul of the State Department by clearing up lines of authority within the bureaucracy.<sup>35</sup> He also adopted a formal and hierarchical management style similar to Truman's. The secretary surrounded himself with qualified assistants, assigned them clear tasks and gave them his full support in disputes with others in the wider bureaucracy. The changes wrought by Truman's appointment of Marshall pushed the State Department to the forefront of US foreign policy-making.

The closeness of Truman and Marshall's relationship is demonstrated by the existence of the Marshall Plan. When pressed by colleagues to put his own name to the policy, Truman refused and was determined to acknowledge the importance of the role played by his secretary of state.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately for Truman, Marshall suffered from ill health and was forced to retire in January 1949 after only two years in office.

### *Acheson*

Truman appointed Dean Acheson as Marshall's successor. Acheson had vast experience of the State Department. He had served as assistant secretary of state from 1941 to 1945. During this time he was integral to the design and implementation of large parts of US wartime economic policy towards Europe, and served as the highest-ranking State Department official at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, before being promoted by Truman to under secretary of state in 1945. With Byrnes and then Marshall often out of the country for long periods of time, Acheson often found himself serving as

acting secretary, responsible for managing the State Department and working closely with President Truman, the cabinet and Congress on matters of policy.<sup>37</sup> The combination of talent, experience and his relationship with Truman secured his promotion to secretary of state in January 1949.

Much like Marshall, Acheson was able to work within Truman's formal style. He also understood what the president expected of him as secretary of state. He had learned by observing Byrnes' mistakes. Acheson knew that the president respected loyalty and expected to be kept fully briefed on a regular basis. To keep Truman happy, Acheson set up regular scheduled meetings and submitted brief outlines of policy developments he was working on with the State Department. In a manner that neither Byrnes or Marshall had been able to do, Acheson also tried to develop policy aligned with Truman's domestic programme, displaying an awareness of presidential electoral politics that Truman welcomed.<sup>38</sup> Truman understood from his previous dealings with Acheson that his new secretary of state would not try to usurp presidential authority, or make crucial decisions without informing the president. Likewise Acheson knew that the president would not try to be the secretary of state, or set up competing foreign policy advisors as FDR had done. In particular, the creation of the National Security Council staff had potential to evolve into a foreign policy rival, should the president choose to empower it. However, Acheson recognised that the State Department would remain the premier foreign policy institution under Truman, and as secretary of state Acheson would remain the president's closest and most important foreign policy advisor. There was little chance that Truman would bypass Acheson and keep him out of the loop on foreign policy.<sup>39</sup> This mutual understanding of the role played by each man helped to facilitate effective foreign policy decision-making during the latter years of the Truman administration.

Acheson was also able to do something Byrnes and Marshall had struggled with, forming a relationship that was more than just professional. Truman and Acheson formed a friendship that created a strong foundation for their working partnership. The somewhat unlikely friendship between a working class Midwesterner and an upper class East Coast Ivy leaguer was based on several factors. Truman respected Acheson's intelligence, competence and experience. He also liked that Acheson was not a yes man and was comfortable speaking his mind to the president.<sup>40</sup> Truman also particularly admired the respect Acheson showed towards the institution of the presidency. Acheson would, on occasion, gently rebuke members of the administration who did not display the correct etiquette towards the president – most notably when he reminded Byrnes not to address the President as 'Harry'.<sup>41</sup> For his part, Acheson respected the president for his directness.<sup>42</sup>

The combination of professional respect and mutual friendship gave President Truman the confidence to empower Acheson as secretary of state even more than he had Marshall. Truman was happy to delegate tasks to Acheson, safe in the knowledge that his secretary would keep him briefed on both the development and implementation of policies that Truman had signed off on.

There was also little risk of Acheson not carrying out the president's orders as instructed. This point shall be discussed in greater detail in the Korea case study, but for our present analysis it helps us to establish the importance of interpersonal relationships in the development of effective foreign policy decision-making. As Robert Donovan has written, 'The appointment of Dean Acheson as Secretary of State was the most important appointment Truman ever made... with respect to the direction of US foreign policy'<sup>43</sup> during his administration. If a president feels confidence in his subordinates and vice versa then this helps remove impediments to effective information flows and decreases the potential for conflict between the two.

It has been shown that Truman implemented a formal management style based on hierarchy, demarcation of jurisdiction, the appointment of advisors based on functional expertise and the delegation of presidential authority. Truman preferred to sit at the top of the hierarchy and wait for information to flow upwards through the bureaucracy. He believed that he would be able to make decisions based on the options presented to him by his expert advisors. Truman placed weight not only on the expertise of his advisors, but also on their personal characters, particularly their loyalty. Thus, personal relationships were a crucial element in determining the success of Truman's ability to work with his staff. The second section of this chapter will now look at the role played by Truman's management system in the development of policy towards Korea.

### **Korea case study**

On 25 June 1950 North Korean communist forces invaded South Korea. In response, President Truman authorised the US military, on the basis of a United Nations Security Council resolution, to lead a UN force to halt the invasion and restore the Korean border. After overcoming initial setbacks that threatened to force the US military off the Korean peninsula, a string of victories allowed the US military to restore the Korean border at the 38th parallel in late September. This was followed by a decision ordering US forces to cross into North Korea in an attempt to reunify the country. As US forces pushed north and approached the border with China in November 1950, the military success was brought to an end when Chinese forces entered the conflict in support of North Korea and pushed the US forces back to the border.

US military intervention in Korea in June 1950 stands as one of the most important foreign policy decisions of Truman's presidency. Truman's authorisation of military force without a congressional declaration of war constitutes a major development in the imperial presidency and stands as a valuable example of deficient presidential decision-making. This section of the chapter will analyse the role played by Truman and his management style in three crucial decisions. The first section outlines Truman's role in the decision to frame Korea as a security threat. The second section analyses Truman's decision to authorise the US military to intervene in the Korean War to halt the North Korean invasion. The third section focuses on Truman's decision to



cross the 38th parallel. The central argument presented is that both Truman's choice of management structure and how he operated within this system are central to the debacle of US intervention in the Korean War.

### *Framing Korea as a security concern*

Korea was not initially a high-ranking security concern for the Truman administration in the first five years after the end of the Second World War.<sup>44</sup> Truman and his advisors viewed Europe as the highest risk because of increasing fears of the Soviet Union encroaching further west. As discussed previously, the growing concern with perceived Soviet ambitions in Western Europe combined with the decline of the traditional powers in the region had challenged Truman and his advisors to reconsider the role of the US in the new bipolar international system. The result was a commitment by the US to retain its presence in Europe. There would be no return to isolationism. The major policies enacted before 1950 were focused on Europe: the declaration of the Truman Doctrine after the crises in Greece and Turkey, the Marshall Plan designed to foster European economic recovery, and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to offer collective security arrangements for US allies in the region. This was the birth of containment and it was implemented initially with the goal of keeping the Soviet Union out of Western Europe to protect US interests.

For Truman and his administration, much like FDR before him during the Second World War, Asia was a secondary consideration. This is not to say that Asia was unimportant. Having fought a war in the region and the mass deployment of US troops still stationed across the Pacific meant that Asia would remain high on the foreign policy agenda of President Truman. The point was merely that US policy towards Europe took precedence. However, even within this area, Korea was not the highest-ranking security or economic concern. Japan was viewed as the most important economic centre in the region as a result of its skilled workforce and latent economic potential (in this sense Japan was very much the Germany of the Far East). Therefore protecting Japan's economic development was the key security concern, followed by the traditional US strategic areas of the Philippines.<sup>45</sup>

However, Korea presented a set of challenges that could prove problematic in both the short and long term. The country had been liberated from Imperial Japan by a joint military effort between the Soviet Union advancing from the north and the US gaining victory in the south. As in Germany, neither side was prepared to allow the unification of the country under the other's system, so Korea was divided at the 38th parallel into two separate political entities.<sup>46</sup> The remaining presence of US troops stationed in the southern Republic of Korea and Soviet troops in the northern Democratic People's Republic of Korea produced another area of the world where the growing US-Soviet Union rivalry could develop. However, as Gaddis has argued, 'American and Russian forces remained there more to restrain each other

than from any strong conviction, in either Washington or Moscow, that the territory itself was significant'.<sup>47</sup> The division of Korea was not viewed with the same concern as the division of Germany. It did not have the strategic, economic or political importance of its European counterpart. Indeed, the major debate on Korea in the US in the first years after the end of the Second World War surrounded the demobilisation of the US army and the removal of US forces from Korea. The Soviet Union did not bother with an extensive debate and removed their troops from North Korea in 1948.<sup>48</sup> The question to address is why did Korea become a security concern?

The debate over the demobilisation of the post-war US armed forces highlights a wider issue, the differing conceptualisations of containment held by different administration officials. There was agreement on what was to be contained, but officials differed over where it was to be contained, and what methods were to be used. In the case of Korea, the fact that US troops were stationed in a country sharing a border with a communist neighbour generated a consensus that containment would be applied there. However, there was disagreement over how much containment there should be and what form it should take. The competing factions were State Department officials and senior members of the US military establishment. Both supported the US sending economic and military aid to shore up the South Korean regime. However, the military wanted the removal of US troops from Korea, whereas the State Department wished for the troops to remain. As Barton J. Bernstein has argued, 'The concept of containment meant different things to different groups within the administration, depending on the perceived value (economic, military, and political) of an area and the cost and type of assistance in applying containment there'.<sup>49</sup> The military did not want to fight in Korea. The joint chiefs of staff (JCS) noted that although Korea was important as a political symbol of US resolve in supporting its allies, the geostrategic location did not favour US victory in a military conflict, and as a result recommended that resources be directed to nations of primary strategic importance in Western Europe and Japan. Only once this objective had been secured should resources be directed to Korea.<sup>50</sup> The State Department, however, stressed the importance of South Korea as a political ally and emphasised the need for US troops to help stabilise the government in the face of post-war social unrest, economic decline and communist agitation from the North.<sup>51</sup>

The decision was left to President Truman. He tried to find a compromise among the competing factions. Not only did he have to concern himself with international political, geostrategic and economic factors, but he also had domestic political factors to address. The long-term deployment of troops in South Korea would drain budgetary resources at a time when they were needed elsewhere. The president signed NSC 8/2 in March 1949, authorising the return of US troops by the end of June. Truman agreed with the joint chiefs of staff. The US could not risk getting involved in a conflict on the Korean peninsula that could escalate into a wider war with the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup> The US would continue to send economic aid to South Korea and

Truman hoped that the country would become 'a beacon to the people of northern Asia in resisting the control of the communist forces which have over-run them'.<sup>53</sup>

Truman had decided Korea was important enough for aid, but not important enough to commit US troops into combat. Unfortunately, there were several factors pushing Korea back up the security agenda. The decade-long Chinese civil war ended in October 1949 when Mao's communists drove Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists from the mainland and proclaimed the People's Republic of China. The communist victory sent shockwaves through US domestic politics, and provided the Republican Party with ammunition to attack President Truman and what they saw as his administration's preoccupation with Europe at the expense of Asia.<sup>54</sup> The continued questioning of 'who lost China?' strengthened Truman's critics, most notably Joseph McCarthy in early 1950, and forced Truman and his administration to publicly explain and justify their policy choices in East Asia.<sup>55</sup> The most famous incident came in January 1950 when Secretary of State Dean Acheson delivered an address to the National Press Club. Discussing the administration's application of the containment policy in East Asia, Acheson explained that there was an American 'defensive perimeter' in the Pacific that included Japan, the Ryukyus islands and the Philippines where America was prepared to use military force to protect US interests in the event of foreign aggression. Although Taiwan and Korea were excluded from this perimeter, Acheson confirmed US economic aid to these countries. Six months later North Korea invaded. Academics have debated for years whether Acheson's public refusal to pledge military support to South Korea was read by the North as a 'green light' to invade, on the basis that the US were not prepared to defend South Korea.<sup>56</sup> However, the speech is important to the present analysis because it demonstrates the growing importance of Korea in US officials' debate over how and where containment should be applied. External events were pushing Korea back up the security agenda.

Finally, President Truman played an important, if unintentional, role in laying the groundwork for possible US military intervention in Korea. Although he did not want troops stationed in South Korea, and signed NSC 8/2 authorising their removal, his prior commitment to the United Nations and the agreement of collective security placed US Korean policy in a bind. If the North did invade South Korea, serious questions would be asked of the President's resolve and would test his commitment to an institution that, as discussed previously, was central to his plans for promoting world peace. It could be argued that all of the above was a growing pile of firewood that was awaiting a spark to ignite it.

### ***Deciding to intervene in Korea: Truman's role***

The spark was provided on 25 June 1950 when North Korean forces invaded South Korea. The size of the North Korean force crossing the 38th parallel

worried American officials on the peninsula to such an extent that they reported the information with great urgency to their bosses in Washington. On hearing the news, Secretary of State Dean Acheson telephoned President Truman, who was home in Independence, Missouri, to inform him of the situation. Truman's initial instinct was to stay in Missouri to wait for further updates. At this point the magnitude of the North Korean invasion was not fully clear, and Truman did not wish to alarm the US public by cancelling his trip to return to Washington. However, by the afternoon, Truman had decided the situation was too urgent to ignore and he decided to fly back to Washington. On his arrival, Truman scheduled a meeting with his highest-ranking national security and foreign policy advisors to take place that evening.<sup>57</sup>

Although the initial discussion focused on what appeared to be the most pressing issue facing the president, whether the US should supply additional arms and equipment to help the South Koreans push back the invasion, attention quickly turned to placing Korea within the wider Cold War context. Two themes were enunciated that would quickly form the heart of US policy towards Korea, and would be repeated again and again at future meetings of Truman and his foreign policy team.

The first was the assumption that the North Korean invasion was being directed by the Soviet Union. The invasion was viewed as part of the communist grand plan for subversion of the free world. As a result, Truman was determined to 'draw the line somewhere' and wanted to discuss the military options the US had available if he decided US military intervention in Korea was required.<sup>58</sup> At this stage both Truman and his advisors were unsure of the Soviet Union's intentions in Korea. They were convinced the Soviet Union had orchestrated the invasion, but they were unsure of whether the Soviet Union would send troops to support the North Koreans, ask the Chinese communists to enter the fighting or whether they would use Korea as a distraction to open a second front elsewhere. Truman focused the discussion on Soviet military strength in the Far East. The fear was that if the US decided to intervene militarily to help South Korea, US forces could end up in combat with Soviet troops which could lead to a wider conflict. The severity of the situation can be shown by Truman asking if the US could 'knock out [Soviet] bases in the Far East?'. General Vandenberg replied 'it might take some time,' but 'it could be done if we used A-bombs'.<sup>59</sup> The atomic bomb was never used, but the fact it was discussed as an option demonstrates how serious the situation was becoming.

The second theme was Truman's belief that the North Korean invasion of South Korea proved a threat to the United Nations and his hopes for world peace. Korea would stand as the first true test of the US's commitment to the notion of collective security on which the UN depended. The UN had issued Security Council Resolution 82 on 25 June. This resolution determined that the invasion constituted a breach of the peace, demanded that North Korea remove its forces north of the 38th parallel, and called on 'all Member States to render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution'.<sup>60</sup> At the meeting Truman announced clearly to his administration

'we are working entirely for the United Nations'.<sup>61</sup> No one in the administration challenged the president on this point as they appeared to be in agreement with Truman. The meeting concluded with Truman ordering General MacArthur to send supplies to the South Koreans and a task force to assess the need for further US assistance. The president also ordered the state and defence departments to survey 'the next probable place in which Soviet action might take place'.<sup>62</sup> Truman 'emphasized the importance' of this last point.<sup>63</sup> North Korea had invaded South Korea but Truman and his administration found it impossible to isolate this incident from the wider Cold War and remained focused on Soviet intentions. This again provides evidence to support the argument that presidential worldview is crucial to the foreign policy decision-making process. By June 1950 Truman had firmly adopted the Cold War mindset. Therefore, the North's invasion of the South was not viewed by Truman as a civil war, but instead as a bold move by the Kremlin to spread communist influence in South East Asia. Combined with Truman's anti-authoritarianism and support for the United Nations, this narrowed Truman's focus to options in support of US intervention to protect South Korea. As will be shown in the next section analysing the decision to cross the 38th parallel, this situation was compounded by Truman's management system, which had resulted in the president surrounding himself with advisors who shared a similar view of the situation.

### ***Initial involvement: air and naval forces***

Over the next five days South Korean forces struggled to hold back North Korean advances. At the next meeting of his national security advisors on 26 June, President Truman ordered the US air force and navy to provide military support to the South Koreans, authorising them to attack any North Korean forces south of the 38th parallel. Truman explained that 'no action should be taken north of the 38th parallel ... not yet'.<sup>64</sup> Truman was clearly worried that any US military action north of the border could run the risk of escalating the situation with China, the Soviet Union or both. However, the fact he did not rule out the possibility of sending US forces into North Korea suggests Truman had not completely given up on the possibility of reuniting Korea through military conquest. The president also ordered the navy's Seventh Fleet to move to the Strait of Formosa to prevent a communist attack on the nationalists holed up on the island of Formosa, as well as increased aid to the Philippines and Indochina.<sup>65</sup> The administration continued to focus on what they believed to be the wider Soviet threat. The president also again reiterated that he was authorising US air and naval power to be used in Korea 'for the United Nations'.<sup>66</sup>

The two themes of Soviet complicity and the United Nations' doctrine of collective security continued to shape the dialogue and agendas of meetings both within the administration and between the administration and Congress. The first meeting of the president with congressional leaders since the outbreak of hostilities provides an illuminating example. Truman informed the

congressmen he 'couldn't let this go by default'.<sup>67</sup> The spectre of communism hung over the meeting as the president explained to the Congressmen:

The communist invasion of South Korea could not be let pass unnoticed ... This act was very obviously inspired by the Soviet Union. If we let Korea down the Soviets will keep right on going and swallow up one piece of Asia after another. We had to make a stand some time or let all of Asia go by the board. If we were to let Asia go, the Near East would collapse and [there is] no telling what would happen in Europe.<sup>68</sup>

Truman had ordered the deployment of troops and he was adamant that it was equally important a line should be drawn at Indo-China, the Philippines and Formosa. This is a clear enunciation of the domino principle and shows the extent to which Truman subscribed to the idea. The invasion of North Korea into South Korea was interpreted purely in Cold War terms. There was no room for debate or dissent. No one challenged the assumptions underlying this prognosis. This was interpreted as a threat to world peace, led by the Soviet Union, and it was the responsibility of the United States to use military force to restore the peace. According to Truman, there was no alternative.

No congressman questioned the president on the issue of Soviet involvement. The congressional leaders were broadly supportive of the president's decisions so far. Senator Wiley said it was 'sufficient for him to know we were in there with force and that the President considered this force adequate'.<sup>69</sup> Instead, most of the discussion focused on the issue of the United Nations. Senator Connelly declared 'this was a clear cut case for the UN. This was an opportunity to test its methods'.<sup>70</sup> Truman agreed and stated he was going to, 'make absolutely certain that everything we did in Korea would be in support of, and in conformity with, the decision by the Security Council of the United Nations'.<sup>71</sup> The remainder of the meeting revolved around clarifying the role of the US in relation to the UN and which other countries were prepared to offer support for the UN in Korea. However, when Senator Wiley asked for clarification on policy in Formosa, the Philippines and Indochina, President Truman was quick to explain that the UN was not involved and that all actions undertaken in these areas were for purposes of US foreign policy only.<sup>72</sup> This is important to note because it demonstrates that support of the UN was restricted to Korea only. Truman was not a utopian. He did wish to develop and strengthen the UN, but he was aware that this could only take place within the complex environment of post-war US foreign policy and at this stage the UN was a means towards an end in Korea.

President Truman reiterated these themes after the meeting in a private conversation with his assistant, George Elsey. In one of his most famous quotes, Truman stated:

Korea is the Greece of the Far East. If we are tough enough now, if we stand up to them like we did in Greece three years ago, they won't take

any next steps. But if we just stand by, they'll move into Iran and they'll take over the whole Middle East. There's no telling what they'll do if we don't put up a fight now.<sup>73</sup>

According to Elsey, 'The president appeared sincerely determined to go very much further than the initial orders that he had approved for General MacArthur the evening before'.<sup>74</sup> Truman viewed Korea as part of what he believed to be the wider Soviet conspiracy for global supremacy. He was therefore prepared to use Korea as an opportunity to 'draw the line', to teach the Soviet Union an important lesson concerning US resolve in protecting its post Second World War national interests. However, at this stage Truman did not know how far the US would have to intervene in Korea to achieve this objective.

### ***Ground troops***

Even with US air and naval support, the South Koreans found it increasingly difficult to hold back the North Koreans. The sense of deepening crisis is evident from the minutes of the NSC meeting held on 29 June. President Truman ordered a complete reassessment of 'all policy papers affecting the entire perimeter of the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics]'.<sup>75</sup> The fear of Soviet involvement framed and intensified the discussion of policy options available. Truman was determined to meet the challenge: 'we should not back out of Korea unless a military situation elsewhere demanded such action'.<sup>76</sup> The seeming inability of the current choice of US naval and air forces to meet the commitment made by Truman to the United Nations prompted Secretary of State Acheson to inform the president 'what has been done may make it imperative to accept all out war'.<sup>77</sup> This would require the involvement of US ground forces in large-scale military combat for the first time since the end of the Second World War and possible attacks on North Korean air bases. The president was not prepared to authorise such actions at that moment and asked for intelligence reports on Soviet actions in Korea, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Iran.<sup>78</sup> Truman still feared that Korea might be a ruse to distract the US from potential Soviet advances in more important regions.

However, the situation in South Korea worsened overnight. General MacArthur sent a telegram to the State Department and joint chiefs-of-staff explaining he had conducted a review of the South Korean military position. In his opinion the South Korean army was incapable of halting the North Korean invasion. The only option left to prevent further North Korean advances was the deployment of US ground troops. He requested a regimental combat team be deployed and recommended two divisions be sent from Japan. At 5am, Secretary of the Army Frank Pace called President Truman to inform him of MacArthur's request. With surprisingly little discussion Truman authorised the deployment of the combat regiment but said he would have to consult with his advisors before he could order the additional two divisions.<sup>79</sup>

The consultation took place a few hours later at a meeting of the NSC, and Truman authorised the deployment of the two divisions. Aware of the magnitude of the decision, the president wanted to make clear in public pronouncements that although US ground forces would be committed to Korea, there would be no war with the Soviet Union. In private, Truman declared he was prepared to defend Korea if the Soviet Union invaded, but did not want to make it public. The sole objective of current, public, policy was to push North Korea back across the 38th parallel and restore the border. However, Truman 'wanted to be sure that we were not so deeply committed in Korea that we could not take care of other situations which might develop'.<sup>80</sup> The president authorised the air force to attack North Korean munitions supplies across the 38th parallel. Truman stated 'such operations should be designed only to destroy munitions supplies' and he 'wanted it clearly understood that our operations in Korea were designed to keep peace in Korea and restore the border'.<sup>81</sup>

This point is important because it demonstrates two key issues. The first is that US policy in Korea at this time was firmly rooted within the broader doctrine of containment. Truman and his administration were primarily focused on pushing the North Koreans back across the 38th parallel and restoring the border. At this stage there was no serious long-term plan to reunite Korea on the battlefield. In the face of the North Korean onslaught this did not appear to be a realistic ambition. The second is the inability of Truman and his advisors to place themselves in the position of other states' decision-makers. Truman believed it was obvious that the decision to deploy ground forces and any US air or naval attack north of the 38th parallel was purely in support of the overall plan to restore the border. However, there is no guarantee that neighbouring states, particularly China, would perceive the operations in the same light. Truman did not comprehend that these actions could be interpreted by China as hostile and it could be argued this constituted the first step on the road to Chinese intervention in November. This final point is particularly troubling in light of two telegrams the US had received from the USSR and China. Acheson interpreted the notes to indicate that the Soviet Union would not intervene in Korea, but they might request the Chinese to intervene on their behalf.<sup>82</sup> This information does not seem to have given Truman and his advisors particular cause for concern, and they carried on with the decision to deploy US ground forces in Korea.

Later on the same day Truman held a meeting with his cabinet and congressional leaders to update them on the developing situation in Korea. The president was less than forthcoming with information regarding the deployment of US troops. He explained that he had not committed any troops to 'actual combat' but had merely sent 'base troops to Pusan to keep communication and supply lines open'.<sup>83</sup> In light of MacArthur's report that US troops would be required to hold the line in Korea it was inevitable that US forces would soon be in 'actual combat' against the North Korean army. Senator Wherry appeared to understand this and told the president he should



advise the congress before sending troops to Korea. Truman explained this had been an emergency and there was no time for lots of talk: 'I just had to act as Commander-in-Chief and I did. I told MacArthur to go to the relief of the Koreans and to carry out the instructions of the United Nations Security Council'.<sup>84</sup> This demonstrates the extent to which Truman subscribed to the concept of presidential prerogative in times of national security crisis. Truman had defined the conflict in Korea as a legitimate emergency and it was in the interests of US national security to engage ground troops in military conflict. As a result he believed he was under no obligation to ask Congress for permission to take this action. He had all the authority he required as commander-in-chief of the US armed forces. Senator Wherry maintained 'I do understand the action, but I do feel Congress ought to be consulted *before* any large scale actions are taken again'.<sup>85</sup> Truman replied, 'If any large scale actions were to take place, he would tell the Congress about it'.<sup>86</sup> The president did not say he would inform Congress before the decision was made let alone ask for their permission.

Truman's decision to authorise the use of the military in Korea without prior discussions with Congress remained a contentious point during the early days of the conflict. At a meeting with his foreign policy team and Senator Lucas on 3 July the topic of whether the President should make a full report to a Joint Session of Congress was discussed. Senator Lucas expressed support for Truman saying the president 'had very properly done what he had to do without consulting Congress' and 'questioned the desirability' of addressing Congress. He went on to add, 'most of the members of Congress were sick of the attitude taken by Senators Taft and Wherry'.<sup>87</sup> However, Taft and Wherry were not present to make their case against presidential use of military force abroad without congressional consent. All the participants were broadly in agreement both with the president's conceptualisation of the crisis (a Soviet backed ploy in line with the domino theory) and with the methods he had chosen to deal with it (the militarisation of the containment policy). This suggests that in little over a week since the beginning of the crisis, the focus of administration discussion on the topic of Korea had narrowed and dissenting voices were already finding it difficult to be heard at the highest levels of US foreign policy decision-making. This highlights the important role played by the president and the impact his management style has on US foreign policy decision-making. By establishing clear lines of jurisdiction and hierarchy, the president ended up working closely with specific individuals responsible for certain policy areas.<sup>88</sup> Therefore he would be receiving information from the same people on the same topics. In the case of the early days of the Korean conflict at no point did he ask directly for the input of those who disagreed with him and his advisors, such as Senators Taft and Wherry. Information was being filtered by both Truman's worldview and his management system, resulting in US foreign policy being increasingly militarised.

Senator Lucas warned 'that to go up to Congress might sound as if the President were asking for a declaration of war'.<sup>89</sup> Truman replied, 'this was

exactly the point'. He said that he 'had not been acting as President but as Commander-in-Chief of our forces in the Far East'.<sup>90</sup> This statement appears rather confusing, the president is commander-in-chief and it is difficult to see how the two can be separated in the manner Truman claimed to be doing, but it does seem like an attempt to offer a constitutional justification for his decision. This can be seen in Truman's closing comment on the matter: 'it was necessary to be very careful' that he 'would not appear to be trying to get around Congress and using extra-Constitutional powers'.<sup>91</sup> Truman was aware of how his actions might be interpreted, and he wanted to make sure that he could claim to be acting within the remit of his office.

### *The crisis deepens*

The crisis in Korea deepened over the summer. Even with the support of US ground forces, the North Koreans continued to advance south, defeating the US and South Korean forces in key areas on the Korean peninsula. Acheson's summary of the cabinet meeting of 12 July provides valuable insight into Truman and his administration's attempts to explain and interpret the development of the Korean situation. They focus almost entirely on the role of the Soviet Union. Acheson explains that the State Department and defence department are in agreement on three general points. The first is that 'the Soviet Union has the military capability at the present time of taking, or inspiring through satellites, military action ranging from local aggression on one or more points along the periphery of the Soviet world to all out general war'.<sup>92</sup> The second is that, while agreeing there is no consensus on the probability of Soviet action, 'it is completely agreed that there is not sufficient evidence to justify a firm opinion that the Soviet Union will not take any one or all of the actions which lie within its military capabilities'.<sup>93</sup> The final point is:

that the present situation is one of extreme danger and tension which, either by Soviet design or by the momentum of events arising from the Korean situation in which actual warfare is in progress, could present the United States with new outbreaks of aggression possibly up to and including general hostilities.<sup>94</sup>

In the face of increasing setbacks on the military front, the underlying suspicion of the Soviet Union is brought even more to the fore and magnified fears of Soviet intervention across the globe.

Unsurprisingly, based on the previous discussion of how the US ranked security threats in the post-Second World War environment, Truman and his administration were concerned with the impact of Korea on Western Europe. Acheson notes, 'It is becoming apparent to the world that we do not have the capabilities to face the threat, and the feeling in Europe is changing from one of elation that the United States has come into the Korean crisis to petrified fright'.<sup>95</sup> Acheson recommended to Truman the only way to improve the

situation in Korea was to order more forces to the conflict and to ask Congress for more money. Truman agreed to do so.<sup>96</sup> This document is important because it reveals the extent to which policy in Korea was dominated by concerns over the Soviet Union and the fear they would invade Western Europe. The fact that Truman and his closest foreign policy advisor shared this view demonstrates the extent to which US decision-makers had adopted the Cold War mindset and the central role this played in the increased militarisation of containment in Korea.

By the end of August, the situation in Korea had begun to improve slightly. Although North Korean forces had driven deep into South Korean territory, the US and South Korean forces were holding a perimeter outside Pusan, a city on the south-east coast. If the North Koreans had captured Pusan then the US would have been forced to abandon Korea. However, by maintaining the perimeter around the city, the US was able to land more troops and supplies, strengthening their position and giving policy-makers hope that the US would be able to counter the North Koreans.

Still central to discussions in Washington was the role of the Soviet Union in Korea and Western Europe. At a meeting of the National Security Council on 25 August, the topic of possible Soviet action in the light of the Korean situation was discussed. The focus, as usual, was Western Europe, particularly the JCS' fear that the Soviet Union were planning to support an East German invasion of West Germany. The president agreed there was a risk Europe would fall to communism, but 'there was no use in re-arming Western European countries if they will not fight'.<sup>97</sup> Truman thought that 'one of our greatest problems is creating this will to fight'.<sup>98</sup> This suggests that Truman believed the US already had the will to fight and Korea stood as an example of his and the US's intention to stand up to what they perceived as Soviet-backed communist aggression in the Far East. The Cold War mindset was hardening in the Truman administration and foreign policy was being dominated by continued analyses of Soviet intentions and military capabilities. The result was to further increase the militarisation of the containment policy that now orientated US foreign policy, highlighting the central role of presidential worldview and management style in the development of Korean policy.

### *Deciding to cross the parallel*

Although the US and UN forces were holding their position around Pusan, they were still in a difficult position. To defeat North Korea they would have to break out of their perimeter. However, it was difficult to see how this could be achieved. The city was surrounded and the US forces had their backs to the sea. General Douglas MacArthur proposed a solution. He devised a plan to launch an amphibious assault on Inchon, a port on the north-west coast of South Korea, 200 miles behind enemy lines, and only 18 miles from Seoul. If he was successful he would be able to cut off the North Korean forces advancing on Pusan, and give US forces in the city a chance to break out.<sup>99</sup>

At dawn on 15 September MacArthur launched his counter-offensive. The landing of the US Tenth Corps took North Korean forces by surprise, and through a combination of skill, force and good fortune the US was able to secure the beachhead and drive on to Seoul. Some military historians have described MacArthur's landing as one of the most daring in all of history.<sup>100</sup> It gave the Eighth Army in Pusan an opportunity to break through the heavy North Korean resistance. The North Koreans were now encircled and began to take heavy losses. An estimate of 25,000 soldiers managed to retreat across the 38th parallel, but the Eighth Army and Tenth Corps linked up at Osan on 26 September, took control of Seoul, and marched towards the border.<sup>101</sup>

At this point the 'Soviet' threat had been contained. The status quo had been returned by securing the 38th parallel, leaving the communists in control of North Korea. Truman could have called a halt to the military's advance. This did not happen. Truman decided to let MacArthur lead his troops across the 38th parallel and pursue the North Korean army in the hope of defeating them on the battlefield and reuniting Korea under the government in Seoul. The policy of containment had morphed into the pursuit of rollback. Truman would attempt to overthrow a communist government through the use of direct US military force.<sup>102</sup>

The initial advance was successful as MacArthur drove the communists north. A question remained as to how far north MacArthur's forces could advance. The major concern was the border with China. Truman made it absolutely clear to MacArthur that he did not want to provoke the Chinese, that there should be no US military activity across or too close to the border.<sup>103</sup> However, the warnings were not heeded and MacArthur advanced too close to the Chinese border. On 30 November the Chinese army invaded. Over 200,000 Chinese soldiers entered the conflict. The US could not defeat them using conventional weapons. The US forces were routed and forced back to the border. MacArthur was able to hold the line, but any chance of all out victory and reuniting Korea was lost as the war descended into a stalemate along the 38th parallel. The question the next section will address is how this was allowed to happen. To answer this it will be necessary to focus on President Truman's worldview, his management style and the quality of decision-making between the president and his advisors.

### **Truman's management style: loyalty and group harmony**

As discussed previously, Truman operated a formal management style. His administration was organised in a strict hierarchy of principals and subordinates, with each of his principals granted jurisdiction over specific policy areas based on their functional expertise. Each advisor was supposed to know their place in the system and know which areas of policy they were responsible for. The result was a presidential management style that encouraged delegation of tasks to his advisors and placed large emphasis on coordinated and careful staff work. Information would flow up from the bureaucracy, and each

cabinet and agency head would be responsible for briefing the president on their relevant policy areas. This would allow Truman to make decisions based on the information he received from below. However, Truman's decision to cross the 38th parallel, which resulted in the Chinese invasion of 28 November, highlights several flaws in both Truman and his system.

In previous sections it was noted that Truman placed a great emphasis on loyalty. It was the glue he hoped would hold his system together. He expected his subordinates to be loyal to him as president, loyal to their colleagues across the executive and loyal to the policies of the administration. In return the president would use his personal and political power to support his staff in any run-ins with Congress, the media, interest groups and the general public.<sup>104</sup> Trust and loyalty are important if any collective enterprise is to succeed, but if loyalty is emphasised at the expense of other important factors, this can have negative consequences for effective decision-making. In the case of Truman and Korea, this can be seen in two areas.

The first is the negative impact resulting from the ideological conformity prevalent within the small group of close advisors who served the president during the Korean crisis. Truman relied on the same advisors throughout: his secretaries of state, defence, army, navy, air force and the joint chiefs-of-staff. Glen Paige conducted interviews with the members of the group and published a study of their first six meetings. His key finding was the existence of high levels of 'intra-group solidarity'. Paige noted, 'One of the most striking aspects [of these meetings] is the high degree of satisfaction and moral rightness shared by the decision makers'.<sup>105</sup> According to one of the participants Paige interviewed, these meetings exhibited 'the finest spirit of harmony I have ever known'.<sup>106</sup> At the outset of US involvement in the Korean War in June Paige concluded, on the basis of these interviews, that the initial decisions to deploy US forces to Korea were made with 'minimal conflict'.<sup>107</sup> This feeling of group solidarity continued to pervade Truman and his small group of advisors throughout the months they worked together on Korea policy. In large respect this feeling of solidarity was the result of the shared worldview held by Truman and his advisors. As discussed previously in this chapter, Truman and his advisors, particularly Dean Acheson, the president's closest and most valued foreign policy advisor, held similar worldviews. Communism, and what they saw as the Soviet Union's aggressive foreign policy, posed the greatest threat to US national security and world peace more broadly. All the members of Truman's close-knit group of advisors agreed it was the responsibility of the US to contain Soviet expansion to protect the free world and the legitimacy of the United Nations. As the documentary analysis of the National Security Council meetings in the previous section has shown, Truman interpreted the North Korean invasion of South Korea as a Soviet ploy designed and implemented to expand communist power beyond the borders of the USSR. This was a view shared by his advisors. On this basis it is clear to see why the decision to intervene in South Korea was made with 'minimal conflict'. Whether this decision to intervene was good or bad has

unsurprisingly provoked serious debate in the literature.<sup>108</sup> However, Truman's decision to allow MacArthur's forces to cross the 38th parallel has raised mostly criticism.

One of the major flaws in Truman's decision-making process in the lead up to the crossing of the 38th parallel was the group harmony that existed between the president and his subordinates produced unsubstantiated optimism. David McLellan interviewed Secretary of State Dean Acheson in the late 1960s and he noted there was 'something strangely unreal ... about those meetings'.<sup>109</sup> This assertion was based on his interpretation of Acheson's testimony during the interview, which demonstrated the extent of cohesion within the administration and the degree of loyalty Truman had been able to cultivate. This was particularly the case between the civilian and military advisors. Where one might expect the civilians to hold more 'dove'-like opinions in contrast with the 'hawkish' views of the military, McLellan concluded 'General Bradley and other members of the JCS shared completely Acheson's view of grand strategy ... Bradley and the Joint Chiefs were so in accord with Truman and Acheson that they earned from Senator Taft the epithet of "political" generals'.<sup>110</sup> As noted in previous sections, the president and Acheson held each other in high regard. These feelings of mutual respect between the president and his subordinates, combined with their shared worldview, generated a sense of optimism within the administration.

Evidence to support this conclusion can be drawn from documentary analysis of two National Security Meetings held in early October. At the first, held on 2 October, barely two weeks after MacArthur's assault on Inchon, the discussion focused on the drafting of NSC 68 and 'United States Objectives and Programs for National Security', the document which would eventually serve as the blueprint for US foreign policy during the Cold War, and laid the foundations for the expansion of the national security and military apparatus required to operationalise the militarisation of the containment policy. However, of central importance to the present analysis of Truman's decision-making in the run up to the Chinese invasion of 30 November, is the president's assertion 'that this program would be a terrific job, particularly after the Korean emergency'.<sup>111</sup> This suggests that as early as October, Truman was feeling confident the conflict would be over quickly on the back of MacArthur's success and he was already planning for long-term military build-up to counter the Soviet Union, without the distraction of Korea. At the second meeting of the NSC, held on 13 October, Truman was presented with a recommendation to cancel NSC 80, a proposed 'Peace Offensive Concerning Korea ... since the stalemate in Korea which it envisaged was no longer a possibility'.<sup>112</sup> President Truman agreed and ordered the project to be cancelled.<sup>113</sup> This demonstrates the level of confidence Truman and his administration had that success would soon be theirs in Korea. No dissenting voices were heard during these discussions.

As Richard Tanner Johnson has argued:

There is much of Truman's style to be found intertwined among what has come to be known as the 'Korean Decisions.' His emphasis on solidarity, his determination to do right, and his preference for harmony left their imprint on the group and its discussions. Unfortunately, in this instance, Truman's style was out of step with the requirements of the situation.<sup>114</sup>

This was because the excessive optimism generated by the close working relationship and sense of intra-group solidarity that had developed between Truman and his foreign policy team produced a negative impact on effective information processing and decision-making within the Truman administration.

### *Ignoring intelligence warnings*

The clearest example of this defect was Truman's decision to ignore the warnings of Chinese military intervention if US and UN forces advanced too close to Korea's border with China. In late September the Chinese government issued several warnings. On 30 September the Chinese Foreign Minister, Chou En-lai, gave a speech before a committee of the People's Political Consultative Conference and stated that China 'could not supinely tolerate the crossing of the parallel,' and 'could not stand aside'.<sup>115</sup> The second direct warning came on 3 October when the Indian Ambassador to China informed the State Department that Chou En-lai had told him 'if United Nations forces crossed the 38th parallel China would send in troops to help the North Koreans'.<sup>116</sup> These warnings were dismissed as bluffs, with Truman believing the Indian Ambassador to be playing 'the game of the Chinese Communists' as he had allegedly done in the past.<sup>117</sup> As Neustadt wrote, 'With the military opportunity before them and with diplomatic dangers out of sight, the men he [Truman] leaned on for advice saw little risk of any sort'.<sup>118</sup> Truman did not take the warnings onboard and did not halt MacArthur's advance north. The Chinese responded by deploying a limited number of troops to tactically engage US and UN forces in the hope of making US leaders realise they were not bluffing. Once again Truman ignored these warnings, even as the limited number of Chinese forces inflicted casualties on US forces in late October and early November. MacArthur continued to follow Truman's order and continued his advance north, pushing ever closer to the Chinese border. Their earlier warnings unheeded, the Chinese launched their mass invasion of over 200,000 troops on 28 November and all hopes of a US victory were extinguished.

How was it possible that Truman could be presented with several warnings of a possible Chinese intervention and, if not ignoring them completely, continued to allow MacArthur to advance US forces ever closer to China? Several factors were at play. As noted above, Truman did not trust the source of the verbal warnings. However, possibly defective intelligence does not explain why he did not take the initial Chinese tactical engagements seriously. Indeed subsequent analysis by scholars suggests that there was enough evidence to take the Chinese threats seriously. As de Weerd has concluded, 'It was not the

absence of intelligence which led us into trouble but our unwillingness to draw unpleasant conclusions from it'.<sup>119</sup> The question of why this was allowed to happen, and Truman's role in shaping the outcome, must be addressed.

Irvin Janis argues that the defective decision-making stemming from the refusal to acknowledge the Chinese warnings was a result of what he terms 'groupthink'.<sup>120</sup> This is a social psychological phenomenon exhibited by small groups of decision-makers. 'Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgement that results from in-group pressures', particularly the desire of small groups to maintain high levels of cohesiveness and pursue concurrence-seeking tendencies at the expense of critical thinking.<sup>121</sup> The result of this diminished capacity for critical thinking is often 'over optimism, lack of vigilance, and sloganistic thinking about the weakness and immorality of out groups'.<sup>122</sup> Applying this framework to Truman's decision to ignore the intelligence warning of an imminent Chinese invasion of North Korea, Janis highlights the impact of these group norms. Although Truman and his advisors were presented with the same intelligence, none of them disagreed with the conclusions drawn or attempted to question initial assumptions. There was no correction of belief or interpretation. Indeed, as Joseph De Rivera has suggested, the members of the group adopted the opposite strategy and reinforced each other's assessments 'in a manner that increased risk taking'.<sup>123</sup> Not one presidential advisor approached the president to voice concerns because they all were 'collaborating in an optimistic view of the situation'.<sup>124</sup> The end result was the decision to continue pushing US forces north towards the Chinese border. Janis concludes this incident 'highlights one of the central themes of the present analysis – the tendency for cohesive groups to foster a shared illusion of invulnerability, which inclines them to minimize risks'.<sup>125</sup>

However, Janis' approach is only of partial use to the current analysis of presidential management style. The phenomenon of groupthink may be found in all small groups where concurrence-seeking behaviour exists. It is not restricted to US foreign policy decision makers.<sup>126</sup> This book wants to demonstrate the way in which the president's choice of management style can create the potential for flawed decision-making, of which groupthink is only one negative outcome. Therefore it is necessary to expand the analysis to focus specifically on President Truman's choice of a formal management system and the extent to which this created the conditions for defective decision-making which led to US forces invading North Korea.

### ***Reliance on too few advisors with similar views***

A major weakness of Truman's management style was a reliance on too few advisors. The nature of the formal style Truman adopted meant that he maintained strict lines of demarcation within his administration. Individual advisors were responsible for specific jurisdictions of policy areas, and they alone were responsible for presenting information to Truman. This was



Truman's choice, believing such a system would allow him to make the best possible choice and avoid what he saw as the bureaucratic confusion of the Roosevelt years. The downside of this system is clear in that it limits the number of voices the president hears on a daily basis. This situation was compounded by the outbreak of the Korean War. The conflict led to Truman increasing his use of the NSC and developing it into a central foreign policy institution. As discussed previously, Truman had issued orders in July that all foreign policy options were to be presented to him through the National Security Council. Truman was even more explicit in relation to Korea policy:

The President instructed the members of the National Security Council ... that all proposals for presidential action in the current Korea crisis *must* be forwarded to him *through the machinery of the National Security Council*. The president said he did not want any unilateral proposals for his action sent to him directly.<sup>127</sup>

The president was not prepared to discuss formal options outside of the NSC machinery. This further centralised US foreign policy within the White House because the only people able to attend NSC meetings were the statutory members. Anyone else who wished to attend required an invitation from the President himself. Thus, if Truman did not ask anyone else to attend, he would be surrounded by the same people at each meeting, all of whom would be offering similar interpretations and recommendations to those he had already held, which confirmed his pre-existing beliefs. This contributed directly to the feeling of intra-group solidarity that proved so deficient for critical analysis of incoming intelligence and objective assessment of available options, which led to the decision to cross the 38th parallel and pursue the destruction of the North Korean army despite the warnings from China. Dean Acheson offers evidence in his autobiography to support this conclusion:

As I look back, the critical period stands out as the three weeks from October 26 to November 17. Then all the dangers from dispersal of our own forces and intervention by the Chinese were manifest. We were all deeply apprehensive. We were frank with one another, but not quite frank enough.<sup>128</sup>

This reliance on too few advisors sharing too similar views did not have to happen. Within the State Department there were dissenting views held by senior officials with well-established reputations within the Truman administration, George Kennan and Paul Nitze. Kennan had been a leading voice in the Truman administration during the early years of the Cold War, contributing directly to formulation of the containment policy. As discussed previously, his 'Long Telegram' and article in *Foreign Affairs* had made a large impact on Truman and the foreign policy establishment in Washington by providing the economic and political rationale for containment. Kennan rejected the

assumption held by Truman and his staff that the communists in China were a Soviet puppet and did not believe they would stay out of the war if the US crossed the 38th parallel. His boss, and newly appointed head of the Policy Planning Staff, agreed with Kennan's assessment. They repeatedly made their case to Secretary of State Dean Acheson at meetings in the State Department; however, as Kennan has written, they were 'relegated to the sidelines: attending the respective meetings in ... the Secretary's office, but not those that took place at the White House level'.<sup>129</sup> With no access to the president Kennan resigned from the State Department in August saying he felt like 'a floating kidney ... one step removed from the real decisions'.<sup>130</sup>

Johnson and Janis suggest Dean Acheson, as Secretary of State, was to blame for not bringing dissenting views such as Kennan's to the president.<sup>131</sup> Acheson's relationship with President Truman certainly proved crucial in the defective decision-making between September and November. As discussed in the previous section, Truman and Acheson were able to work together on the basis of mutual respect and friendship. However, once again, the Korean crisis demonstrates the potential flaws of such close working relationships within President Truman's choice of a formal management style. Within the president's management system Dean Acheson was given the task of Truman's principal foreign policy advisor. Acheson acted as the primary source of foreign policy information reaching the president's desk from the State Department. His role was to directly link the State Department to Truman. However, Johnson and Janis both suggest he failed in this task. By deciding not to present the views of Kennan and Nitze to President Truman, Johnson argues 'Acheson the "funnel" of information, had become the "filter"'.<sup>132</sup> Janis offers an even stronger rebuke suggesting:

Secretary Acheson had adopted the role of a self appointed mind-guard, making sure that Kennan and those who shared his critical views of the risks of provoking Communist China were always kept at a safe distance from the men who had the power to shape United States policy in the Korean War.<sup>133</sup>

Again, Acheson himself seems to offer evidence to support this:

in the three weeks and three days from November 10 until December 4, when disaster was full upon us...two secretaries met five times with the president, and I consulted with him on five other occasions. I have an unhappy conviction that none of us, myself prominently included, served him as he was entitled to be served.<sup>134</sup>

This suggests that, on reflection after the events, Acheson realised that the president's advisors had not performed their roles in the manner expected of them. This is an important point for two reasons. The first is that it shows Acheson also agrees there were weaknesses in Truman's management system

that had an impact on decision-making during the course of the Korean War. Had these defects been realised earlier, it is possible the intelligence warnings would have been heeded and the US may not have advanced so far north, or may not have even crossed the 38th parallel at all. The options may have been evaluated differently if the president had heard more dissenting voices. The second point is that it demonstrates both the role of presidential agency and its limitations. The president was responsible for developing his management system and choosing his key advisors. However, the other actors also had a role to play. Acheson acknowledges he did not serve the president as well as he could have in terms of providing information and generating options. This suggests that even if the president had included other advisors there is no guarantee they would have performed as expected. There are limits to the president's ability to get the best out of his advisors.

The documentary record demonstrates that the highest-ranking members of the Truman administration held grave concerns over the course of events in Korea as early as July. In a letter dated 12 July, Secretary of State Dean Acheson wrote to Paul Nitze, the director of the State Department's policy planning staff to outline his views on both the short- and long-run situation in Korea as he saw it. In the immediate future Acheson believed the US would need to put in 'the force necessary to reoccupy the 38th [parallel]', and that most administration officials shared this view, 'so long as the Chinese and Soviets do not officially come in'.<sup>135</sup> Acheson recommends that to avoid the risk of Chinese and Soviet intervention the US should limit their military activities to the Korean peninsula and should not attack Chinese territory. However, if the Chinese or the Soviet Union did intervene then the US should be prepared to fight 'unless and until the war becomes general'.<sup>136</sup> This conclusion is rather troubling because it is difficult to envisage open conflict between US and Soviet ground forces not escalating into a general war and all the risk this would entail in the nuclear age. However, of concern to the current analysis is Acheson's view that the Soviet Union and Chinese would not intervene so long as the US's goal was solely to restore the border at the 38th parallel. This was the underlying assumption driving the early development of policy in the first months of the Korean conflict.

The tone of the letter changes when Acheson ponders the long-term future of the US in Korea: 'If we succeed in reoccupying the country, the question of garrisoning it and supporting it arises. This is expensive, requires troops needed elsewhere and presents a hard program to continue domestically. But I do not see how to avoid it'.<sup>137</sup> The Secretary continues:

It seems abstruse to ask the country to sacrifice men and money to retake Korea to support the UN, and then let it slip away by default. I do not know how long this situation would continue, particularly in the light of changing conditions, but I cannot see the end of it. In other words, as the Virginians say, we have bought a colt.<sup>138</sup>

This demonstrates that as early as 12 July Acheson held serious concerns about the long-term future of US policy in Korea. The content of Acheson's letter raises the question of how often these concerns were discussed with the president and whether or not sufficient time was devoted to the topic of long-term planning. Even without Chinese intervention the US was being drawn into a quagmire and it is difficult to establish if the president and his administration were aware of the consequences of their decisions. Acheson's letter reveals his personal view of the situation, but it also highlights potential weaknesses in Truman's management style and his relationship with his closest advisors. There was no member of his team pushing hard for a serious reconsideration of Korea policy, and Acheson, the president's closest foreign policy advisor, did not appear to be voicing his concerns to Truman.

However, it must be stressed that Truman allowed this situation to develop. For a man almost obsessed with making the correct decision, it highlights a great personal flaw that he did not actively seek out alternatives. He sat and waited for options to present themselves to him through his formal channels. Roosevelt's system may have had its problems, but a real strength was his ability to find dissenting views and alternative policy options before bringing them back to his advisors and forcing them to rethink or justify their initial choices. By doing so this ensured that a broader array of options was discussed with longer periods of critical analysis. Truman was unable to do this and his choice of formal system only reinforced the problem. Therefore the blame does not lie solely with Acheson. President Truman must shoulder the responsibility for not asking either for Kennan or Nitze personally, and for failing to order Acheson to seek out alternative views from within the State Department. If Truman had done so, more caution may have been exercised in the lead up to the crossing of the 38th parallel and it may have been possible to avoid the Chinese intervention. This demonstrates not only the importance of a president's choice of management system but also how they choose to use the system and the impact this has on US foreign policy. Truman could have operated a formal system and kept his information channels open by asking other members of the bureaucracy for advice. Instead, he chose not to. He continued to listen to the same voices, the result of which was his decision to cross the 38th parallel and bring the Chinese into the Korean War, ending any hope of a US victory.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the development of Truman's management style and its application to policy-making during the Korean War. It argued that Truman developed a formal management system based on his individual preferences which had developed during his time in the army and US Senate. It demonstrated how important personal relationships were to the functioning of Truman's presidency by focusing on the president's relationships with his Secretaries of State. By constructing a case study of US policy towards Korea,

it was possible to draw evidence to support the argument that both Truman's choice of management structure and how he operated within this system are central to understanding the debacle of US intervention in the Korean War. The negative outcomes were in part the result of Truman's management system and the choices he made. Framing Korea as a security concern, intervening in the war, crossing the 38th parallel and advancing towards the Yalu River, these were all the president's choices. How these decisions were made are crucial to understanding the development of the Korean War, and provide evidence to demonstrate the role of presidential agency.

Truman chose to run a formal system, chose his advisors, chose to centralise Korean War decision-making within the NSC, and chose not to invite additional advisors into the NSC. This demonstrates the central role of the president in making the US foreign policy-making system run. The situation was compounded by Truman's worldview and the fact his advisors shared similar assumptions with regard to the role of the Soviet Union in the Korean War. The result was that Truman heard a narrow range of views, did not evaluate the alternatives, and pushed the US further towards the militarisation of containment. The important point to note is that making the case for presidential agency does not equate with the president making the correct choices all the time, dominating the policy-making process and achieving the outcomes they want. This would be an oversimplification and exaggeration. Instead, Truman and Korea highlight that the negative and unintended consequences of presidential agency, in this case the result of the compounding factors of presidential worldview and management style, are just as important. Finally, this chapter has provided empirical evidence to support the argument that it is necessary to incorporate presidential agency into a multi-level framework in order to explain the development of US foreign policy.

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## **5 Reagan's worldview and management style**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will focus on the foreign policy of Ronald Reagan. It begins by placing the Reagan administration in historical context. Late 1970s US foreign policy was marked by arguments over the idea of American decline and Soviet resurgence. The election of Ronald Reagan offered a strong counter to these arguments and generated support for increased American assertiveness in international relations. The chapter then moves on to look at the development of Ronald Reagan's worldview, particularly his view of American power and the Soviet Union, his vision for American foreign policy and how this shaped his attitude to executing the functions of the office of the presidency. It addresses several questions. Why was Reagan so strongly anti-communist? What impact did this have on his foreign policy? This chapter argues that Reagan's worldview was formulated as a result of his direct experience of working with American communists in Hollywood in the 1940s and his dislike of the policy of containment. As a result, Reagan entered the White House with a desire to increase the military capabilities of the United States to counter what he viewed as the advances made by the Soviet Union in the developing world, leading directly to the development of the policy of roll-back. This provides evidence to support the argument that presidential worldview is central to setting the US foreign policy agenda.

The second part of the analysis focuses on Reagan's management of the executive branch and bureaucracy. It will be shown that, as with all presidents, the operation of the executive is a direct consequence of the management preferences of the president. Although Reagan was keen to involve himself in formulating the long-term strategic goals of his administration, he was less willing to actively participate in the details and day-to-day complexity of foreign policy-making. It will be shown that Reagan adopted a formal management system, but complicated matters by delegating a large amount of authority to his subordinates when it came to the actual implementation of policy. The chapter will argue that Reagan's management weaknesses directly contributed to the bureaucratic confusion that existed during his administration. In particular, it will focus on Reagan's inability to manage the relationship between his National Security Council staff and the State Department, the

relationship between the national security advisor and the secretary of state, and the divisions between the hardliners and moderates within his administration. In doing so it will show how important the president's management style is to the functioning of the foreign policy-making process.

### **The historical context of the Reagan administration and Reagan's worldview**

US foreign policy faced several difficulties in the late 1970s. The legacy of the Vietnam War had produced a strong sentiment amongst the American population flatly opposed to deploying US troops in large numbers anywhere in the world unless there was a threat of the highest order to US national security. This domestic restriction on US military intervention left policy-makers questioning the limits of American power. There was a widely held perception that the US was in decline and was faced with the growing threat of a resurgent Soviet Union. The Iran hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had served to many as examples of American weakness. This was coupled with domestic economic stagnation as a result of the oil crises. The foreign policy of Jimmy Carter hinted at the lessening of containment, acceptance of the Soviet Union and attempted to incorporate new ideas of multilateralism and the promotion of human rights as US goals.<sup>1</sup>

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 offered a striking alternative to this feeling of malaise. Reagan rejected any notion of American decline and promised to restore America to its rightful place as the most powerful (and greatest) nation on Earth. Reagan believed American foreign policy should be based on the strongest view of American exceptionalism. He argued that Jimmy Carter had given in to liberal defeatism and it was now his job to lead a conservative revolution that would replace the pessimism of Carter with faith in the unlimited potential of American greatness. At his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, Reagan stated, 'They say that the United States has had its day in the sun; that our nation has passed its zenith ... that the future will be one of sacrifice and few opportunities ... My fellow citizens I utterly reject that view'.<sup>2</sup>

For Reagan, there was a simple prescription to be followed to restore the US to her former glories: 'the "simple answers" were: free enterprise, deregulation, the ending of self-doubt, rearming in the face of Soviet aggression, and rejuvenation of the national democratic (and messianic) purpose'.<sup>3</sup> The focal point of US foreign policy was the Soviet Union. Reagan viewed US–Soviet Union relations in simple good versus evil terms. At a television conference in January 1981, Reagan proclaimed that the Soviet leaders 'have openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognise is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat, in order to attain that'.<sup>4</sup> As will be shown later in the chapter, this dichotomy influenced almost every level of US foreign policy during his administration.

Reagan had been a staunch anti-communist since his time spent working as the leader of the Screen Actor's Guild in the Hollywood movie industry in the late 1940s where he came into direct contact with communist activists.<sup>5</sup> Writing in his memoirs, Reagan described his experience dealing with left-leaning Conference of Studio Unions and the movie industry strike of 1946:

These were eye opening years for me ... Now I knew from firsthand experience how Communists used lies, deceit, violence, or any other tactic that suited them to advance the cause of Soviet expansionism. I knew from the experience of hand-to-hand combat [with the union leaders] that America faced no more insidious or evil threat than that of communism.<sup>6</sup>

Reagan's view of communists and the Soviet Union was cultivated further over the next 20 years during his employment with General Electric. He was hired as a company spokesman and spent most of the 1960s giving speeches to conservative and business groups attacking communism and refusing to acknowledge the right of the Soviet Union to exist.<sup>7</sup>

On entering office, Reagan based his Soviet policy on several assumptions about the nature of the bipolar structure of the international system. The first was that the Soviet leaders were adherents of Marxist-Leninist ideology and thus the foreign policy of the Soviet Union would inevitably seek the destruction of the liberal democratic capitalist countries and the creation of a one-world communist state governed from Moscow. At a television conference in January 1981, Reagan stated:

I know of no leader of the Soviet Union since the revolution, and including the present leadership, that has not more than once repeated in the various Communist congresses they hold their determination that their goal must be the promotion of world revolution and a one-world Socialist or Communist state, whichever word you want to use.<sup>8</sup>

If the Soviet Union was planning world domination, then the US had no choice but to do all it could to halt this advance. This produced the second assumption, that the US and the Soviet Union were engaged in a zero-sum conflict. Gains for the Soviet Union were by definition losses for the US. Defeat in Vietnam and Soviet advances into Afghanistan and other developing countries posed a security threat to the US in the eyes of Reagan and his administration.

Here we can clearly see the link between Reagan's worldview and the origins of his Soviet policy. His dealings with communist workers in the film industry during the 1940s had provided him with an ideological lens through which he interpreted Soviet foreign policy over the previous 40 years. It should be noted that Reagan was obviously not the only American policy-maker who held staunch anti-communist views. However, what is important to note is that Reagan's views of the nature of the Soviet Union and its

foreign policy were based in large part on his dealing with American workers over four decades previously. Rather than attempting to grapple with the complex realities of Soviet power, geostrategic interests and communist ideology, Reagan often fell back on over simplified assumptions. Of course, as discussed in Chapter 1, it is inevitable that policy-makers will develop simplifications of reality to cope with the complexities of foreign policy decision-making. However, these are often based on experiences of dealing with similar situations or learning from others who have such experience.<sup>9</sup> Where Truman suffered from a famously weak understanding of history and often deployed poor choices of historical analogies,<sup>10</sup> Reagan relied too often on inappropriate personal experiences and projected these simplifications onto reality and his decision-making suffered as a consequence.

This in large part stemmed from the fact that Reagan had had almost no contact with anyone from the Soviet Union. He had never travelled to the country, had never met any of its people, and had only met one Soviet leader when Richard Nixon invited Reagan, then Governor of California, to meet Leonid Brezhnev. It was not until the third year of his presidency that Reagan allowed George Shultz to arrange a meeting with the Soviet ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin. Although the meeting was deemed a success, Reagan was unable to distance himself from the image of the Soviet Union that was cultivated 40 years earlier. James Mann recounts an interesting example of this: 'A couple of years later, when Dobrynin was leaving his job as ambassador to return to Moscow, Reagan expressed astonishment that such a polished, urbane diplomat could represent the evil empire. "Is he *really* a communist?" Reagan asked.'<sup>11</sup> Although this may have been a joke, it highlights the difficulty Reagan had in differentiating between the stereotyped view of communists and the Soviet people he had developed and the reality of dealing with the Soviet Union as an actor in the international arena. We will also see later how this narrow view of communists affected his ability to comprehend the problems posed by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. By defining them as communists hell bent on aggression and regional domination, Reagan was unable to deviate from his policy of total support of the Contra forces, who were engaged in armed rebellion against the Sandinistas. Indeed, Reagan's over-simplified worldview limited his ability to comprehend the difficulties involved in supporting an organisation as controversial as the Contras. Trying to paint the Contras as 'Freedom fighters'<sup>12,13</sup> and 'the moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers and the brave men and women of the French Resistance'<sup>14</sup> was just one of the outcomes of a worldview which divided the world into good and bad and offered little room for compromise.

However, even at this early stage, and with something as apparently simple as Reagan's worldview of international relations and the nature of the US–Soviet relationship, it is possible to identify a contradiction that would play a part in the policy incoherence of the later years, particularly in the president's Nicaragua policy. Reagan had been elected on the back of a severe criticism of Jimmy Carter, particularly his accusation that on Carter's watch America

had grown weak while the Soviet Union had increased in strength. During his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, Reagan asked the delegates, 'Can you look at our reduced standing in the world today and say, "Let's have four more years of this?"'<sup>15</sup> Such words were intended to signal that Carter had failed to halt the growing advances of the Soviet Union. However, this assertion of the Soviet Union's unquenchable desire for world conquest, and the very real possibility that it may happen if America failed to act, is somewhat contradicted by his Notre Dame commencement address a year later where he stated, 'The West won't contain communism, it will transcend communism. It won't bother to dismiss or denounce it, it will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written'.<sup>16</sup> Reagan seemed to have difficulty in determining whether the Soviet Union was in ascendance or whether it was doomed to collapse. This lack of coherence in Reagan's worldview would eventually lead to competing and conflicting policies in the administration's policy towards Nicaragua. By failing to clearly articulate a coherent image of 'the enemy', it made it possible for different factions within the bureaucracy to interpret Reagan's strategy in different ways and would thus end up competing with each other, often breaking down into heated conflict fuelled by the ideological divisions between the factions.<sup>17</sup>

Having established Reagan's worldview it is now necessary to analyse how this influenced the formulation of foreign policy during his administration. In terms of direct US-Soviet Union relations, Reagan had very specific goals he wished to achieve. As noted above, Reagan believed that the balance of power had tipped in favour of the Soviet Union. Indeed Reagan thought that the Soviet Union had exploited the period of détente to achieve dominance over the US. Speaking to reporters in August 1981, Reagan claimed that 'the Soviet Union has been engaged in the greatest military build-up in the history of man, and it cannot be described as necessary for their defence. It is plainly a build-up that is offensive in nature'.<sup>18</sup> He feared that the Soviet Union would soon be in a position of dominance 'where they can some day issue to the free world an ultimatum of "surrender or die"'.<sup>19</sup> To counter what he saw as threatening Soviet behaviour, Reagan ordered an increase in defence spending to bolster the conventional military strength of the US. Increased military spending was the top foreign policy priority during the first year of the Reagan administration. By August 1981 Reagan was claiming that his strategy was having the desired affect: 'They [the Soviet Union] are squealing like they're sitting on a sharp nail simply because we now are showing the will that we're not going to let them get to the point of dominance'.<sup>20</sup>

## **The Reagan Doctrine**

The purpose of this analysis is not to chart the steps of Reagan's Soviet policy nor to evaluate the role played by Reagan in 'winning' the Cold War. There is a vast literature on this topic and it pushes well beyond the scope of this monograph.<sup>21</sup> Instead, this analysis focuses on a specific aspect of Reagan's

foreign policy and, in the following chapter, its application in one particular country. Complementing Reagan's policy of increased direct confrontation with the Soviet Union was what is now commonly referred to as the Reagan Doctrine.

***The origins of the Reagan Doctrine: rollback in the developing world***

The Reagan Doctrine stemmed from one of the deepest held beliefs of Reagan, and was a direct consequence of his worldview. While working as a corporate spokesman for General Electric in the 1960s, Reagan began to think about the US's conduct of foreign affairs and formulated what he believed was a better US Cold War policy. He argued that because of the inherent nature of the Soviet Union to forever strive for expansion and domination, the policy of containment formulated during the Truman administration was not now and had never been a viable strategy. The only option that was available to the US was to try and roll back the communists. Speaking in a magazine interview in 1961, Reagan argued, 'Containment won't save freedom on the home front any more than it can stop Russian aggression on the world front ... we must roll back the network of encroaching control'.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned earlier, the issue was about more than mere geostrategic interests of the US. Reagan questioned the very morality of a policy that accepted the Soviet Union as a legitimate international actor and sought accommodation with it. Reagan believed it was not acceptable to 'say to a billion enslaved human beings behind the Iron Curtain – "Give up your hopes of freedom because we've decided to get along with your slave masters"'.<sup>23</sup>

Once elected to president, Reagan began formulating a policy of rollback, which he hoped would replace containment as the cornerstone of US national security strategy. However, Reagan was well aware that he was not the first policy-maker to call for an attempt to rollback the Soviet Union. As secretary of state under Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles had attempted to push US Soviet policy in a more aggressive direction.<sup>24</sup> The bipolar nature of the international system and the parity of military power between both states, however, meant that there was very little scope for direct superpower confrontation. Dulles and Eisenhower had learned this painfully when the US was left helpless in the face of Soviet intervention in Hungary during the 1956 revolution.<sup>25</sup> Reagan was well aware that with the threat of nuclear war ever present, there was no way he would be able to challenge the Soviet Union militarily, let alone roll the Soviet Union back from Eastern Europe.

With this understanding of the balance of power, Reagan knew that US foreign policy and any policy of rollback would have to be tempered to the strategic realities facing the US. As previously discussed, Reagan had been elected on the back of a campaign that had attacked Jimmy Carter for allowing the Soviet Union to expand its influence abroad. Particularly, Reagan was worried about the increased involvement of the Soviet Union in developing countries, such as Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua. Reagan

accused the Soviet Union of exploiting the US policy of détente to support revolutionary movements in third world countries who were trying, and often succeeding, in overthrowing the existing governments. With Reagan viewing international relations as a zero-sum game, these gains for the Soviet Union resulted in damaging losses for the US. It was under these conditions that Reagan wished to formulate a policy of rollback. He wanted to see these revolutions overturned and believed the US was in a position to help. As we shall see in the following sections, the specific policy developed was one that promised aid to anti-communist rebel forces who were trying to overthrow the newly installed leftist governments.

***The role of Reagan in formulating the doctrine: freedom fighters***

At this point it will be useful to contextualise the above discussion. This chapter is not arguing that Reagan was the sole architect of US foreign policy in his administration. It will be shown that the Reagan Doctrine, and the specific policies that were enacted, took shape as a result of a complex process of bureaucratic decision-making at the highest levels of the executive, where the president was one of several important players, along with the inevitable involvement of Congress. However, what the preceding discussion has focused on is the extent to which Ronald Reagan's earliest experiences with communists shaped his particular worldview of international politics, especially his perception of the nature of the Soviet Union. As a result, Reagan came to office with a specific idea of how he wished US foreign policy to be conducted. He wanted the US to rearm in the face of Soviet aggression to be able to stand up to Soviet foreign policy, with the long-term goal of reducing the Soviet Union's ability to influence world events in its favour. He wanted to achieve this by increasing US involvement in the third world by giving aid to anti-communist rebels who were fighting against recently established revolutionary communist governments. The actual shape these policies took was obviously the result of the complex process of US foreign policy-making. However, it was Reagan who came to office and set the agenda from which these policies emanated.

Previously we analysed the speeches and public remarks of the president to ascertain his worldview. As an actor, Reagan was fully aware of the important roles that speechmaking, public relations and appearance play in the functioning of the presidency.<sup>26</sup> During his first inaugural address, Reagan articulated his worldview and announced the direction he wished to take US foreign policy: 'as we renew ourselves here in our own land, we will be seen as having greater strength throughout the world. We will again be the exemplar of freedom and a beacon of hope for those who do not now have freedom'.<sup>27</sup> Reagan was using his speech to connect the ideas of domestic renewal, increased military power and the belief in American exceptionalism. He also began to develop his ideas for supporting allies abroad, which would eventually evolve into the Reagan Doctrine: 'To those neighbours and allies who



share our freedom, we will strengthen our historic ties and assure them of our support and firm commitment. We will match loyalty with loyalty'.<sup>28</sup> Reagan also issued a stark warning to 'the enemies of freedom' that 'peace is the highest aspiration of the American people. We will not negotiate for it, sacrifice for it; we will not surrender for it, now or ever'.<sup>29</sup> As we shall see, such an attitude of refusing to negotiate for peace would lead to the prolonged difficulties Reagan and his administration would have in dealing with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. However, what is important for the current analysis is that here we have a clear example of Reagan actively setting the agenda for US foreign policy during the course of his administration. He is stating that America is prepared to promote peace and freedom abroad to protect US national security and that the US 'will maintain sufficient strength to prevail if need be, knowing that if we do so we have the best chance of never having to use that strength'.<sup>30</sup>

Reagan's inaugural address represented the broad brushstrokes that the president was using to fashion a distinct foreign policy. It was not until his speech to the British parliament in 1982 that the development of the Reagan Doctrine began to take place. He called for a 'crusade for freedom' and declared the US would strive to aid democratic movements around the world to 'foster the infrastructure of democracy...which allows a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means'. Reagan claimed that if this strategy was adopted 'the march of freedom and democracy... will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history'.<sup>31</sup> Here we see a clear progression in Reagan's conceptualisation of US foreign policy. A year previously at his inaugural address he announced that the US would continue to support its allies in freedom. Now, Reagan was announcing that the US was prepared to support those who were willing to fight against the 'enemies of freedom' in the newly declared crusade for democracy. At this stage it was not clear whether this support would be restricted to governments only. By the time he delivered his state of the union address in 1985, Reagan had made clear that his crusade included support for counter revolutionary groups. He declared, 'support for freedom fighters is self-defence'. To justify this controversial claim he quoted the argument of Harry Truman, arguing, 'our security and the world's hopes for peace and human progress "lie not in measures of defence or in the control of weapons, but in the growth and expansion of freedom and self-government"'.<sup>32</sup> This is the clearest articulation of the Reagan Doctrine. It illustrates the extent to which Reagan's worldview had been formulated into a set of ideas that Reagan was now declaring to be the foundation for a significant part of US foreign policy. It attempted to tap into the most important ideas of US identity and political culture, freedom and democracy, whilst confronting what Reagan believed to be the strategic realities of the international system.<sup>33</sup> In doing so, Reagan set an agenda for what he wanted to achieve as president. This is important for the central argument of this study because it demonstrates the role of presidential agency. US foreign policy was

framed in terms of anti-communism and it was Reagan who continued to push for the development of rollback. What we shall now proceed to analyse is how Reagan tried to operationalise his doctrine as head of the executive.

## **Reagan's management system**

### ***Cabinet government and formalism***

Reagan came to office with well-defined ideas of how he wished foreign policy to be conducted. As Richard Neustadt has written, 'Reagan brought his "purposes" in with him, his commitments, whereas others acquired theirs while working at the job, experiencing the impact of events on initial intentions'.<sup>34</sup> As governor of California Reagan had operated a formalist cabinet system of government, and he wished to continue this system during his time as president. He believed that he was best served by the heads of departments acting as his principal advisors. Reagan expected his cabinet heads to carry out the dual role of being the managers of their departments responsible for the day-to-day operation of their staff and the executors of his policies. He wanted them to be dedicated to his strategy and loyal to him as president.<sup>35</sup> Drawing on the typology developed by Johnson, Reagan entered the White House wanting to run a formal management system. His chief advisors would be appointed on the basis of their role as head of an executive department or agency. This would establish the clear lines of jurisdiction necessary to run the formalist system.

In the field of foreign policy, it initially appeared that Reagan would be placing the secretary of state at the head of the foreign policy-making apparatus. Reagan publicly declared that the secretary of state would be his 'primary advisor [and] the chief formulator and spokesman for foreign policy for this administration'.<sup>36</sup> This seemed to be confirmed when Reagan downgraded the role of the national security advisor. Rather than working directly with the president, Reagan instructed that his national security advisor would report through the White House counsellor. This was a position created by Reagan for the purpose of coordinating domestic and foreign policy. This was a deliberate choice made by Reagan after witnessing the turmoil of the Carter administration's foreign policy.<sup>37</sup> During the 1980 election campaign Reagan had spoken out against what he saw as the debilitating effect that inevitably results when confusion exists as to the defined roles of the secretary of state and the national security advisor. He claimed that the Carter administration was 'unable to speak with one voice in foreign policy' because of the chaos of the Cyrus Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski relationship.<sup>38</sup> By placing the secretary of state at the centre of foreign-policy making and relegating the national security advisor to the coordination of policy, Reagan hoped his administration would be able to speak with one voice in the pursuit of his chosen objectives.

However, by the time Reagan took office and began to structure the policy-making apparatus of his administration, several problems had been created

that challenged his alleged desire for cabinet government and a formal management system. First was his decision to appoint his famous 'troika' to the White House staff. James Baker was appointed chief-of-staff, Michael Deaver was made deputy chief-of-staff and Edwin Meese was given the role of the newly created White House counsellor. To use Peter Rodman's phrase, Ronald Reagan expected these men to act as his 'palace guard'.<sup>39</sup> Their duty was to defend Reagan's prerogative and to look out for both his personal and presidential interests in the decision-making process. However, by strengthening the power of the White House staff, this sowed the seeds for future antagonisms with the cabinet heads. One large problem was created because the troika had control over access to the president. Alexander Haig, Reagan's first secretary of state, complained that the White House staff limited his access to the president: 'During the transition from the election to the inauguration, I saw the president alone once! ... That's all. That began to worry me very, very much, early on'.<sup>40</sup> The president was publicly declaring that he was in favour of cabinet government but in reality there would be a strong White House presence in almost every aspect of policy-making. It is inevitable that the president's White House staff will have a role to play; however, as discussed in Chapter 2, it is the president who decides how large this role will be and what the relationship will be with the cabinet heads. By granting such authority to his three closest White House advisors, it was clear that Reagan would not be relying solely on his cabinet heads, particularly in foreign policy.

The second obstacle to cabinet government and a formal management system in foreign policy was revealed when Reagan began to organise the National Security Council. As noted above, the role of the national security advisor was downgraded, but the institution of the NSC was to play a crucial, and ever increasing, role within the Reagan administration. The structure of the NSC was laid down in the second National Security Decision Directive (NSDD). The NSDDs were documents signed by the president to 'promulgate presidential decisions implementing national policy and objectives in all areas involving national security'.<sup>41</sup> These documents were Reagan's equivalent to the NSC Intelligence Directives during the Truman administration (NSC-68 for example) and 'constituted the fundamental, authoritative statements of US national security during the Reagan administration'.<sup>42</sup> NSDD 2 explained how the NSC was to be organised, and what roles would be played by its statutory members.

According to NSDD 2, the 'National Security Council (NSC) shall be the principal forum for consideration of national security policy issues requiring presidential decision'.<sup>43</sup> The secretary of state is designated as the president's 'principal foreign policy advisor. As such, he is responsible for the formulation of foreign policy and for the execution of approved policy'.<sup>44</sup> He is also granted responsibility for 'the overall direction, coordination, and supervision of the interdepartmental activities incident to foreign policy formulation'.<sup>45</sup> The secretary of defence and director of the Central Intelligence Agency were designated as the principal advisors for defence and intelligence policy,

respectively. As discussed earlier, the assistant to the president for national security affairs (the formal title of the national security advisor) was placed lower down the foreign policy hierarchy. He was expected to work 'in consultation with the regular members of the NSC' and be 'responsible for developing, coordinating and implementing national security policy'.<sup>46</sup> What this document clearly shows is that Reagan wanted an explicit hierarchy within his administration. The secretary of state would have pride of place in the actual formulation of policy, whereas the national security advisor would operate in a managerial position whose role was to coordinate the work of the higher ranked policy-makers.

However, the role of the secretary of state was further complicated by the organisational structure of the NSC developed by NSDD 2. Reagan wanted to combine his cabinet style of policy-making with the development of inter-agency groups 'to assist the NSC at large and its individual members in fulfilling their responsibilities'.<sup>47</sup> Three interagency groups were created with responsibility for foreign policy, defence policy and intelligence. The expectation was that foreign policy-making was more complex than the State Department could handle on its own and therefore would require inter-departmental cooperation to function smoothly. The interagency groups were designed to solve any interdepartmental issues that arose, or, 'if such matters required higher-level consideration, report them to the Secretary of State for decision or referral to the NSC'.<sup>48</sup> This challenged the formal system of foreign policy-making by blurring the lines of jurisdiction between the State Department and the NSC staff.

What can be seen, therefore, is that even before the Reagan administration turned itself to the substantive problems of foreign policy-making, the procedural system that had been put in place by Reagan contained the potential for complication and deviation from his stated preferred method of operating. Reagan claimed that he wanted to run foreign policy with the secretary of state as his closest advisor. Up to a point this was possible, especially with a weakened national security advisor. However, by placing such priority on the NSC from the very start, it is possible to argue that the secretary of state could at best hope to be a first among equals in the Reagan foreign policy team. By creating an inter-agency structure that was to be run through the NSC, it is difficult to see how any secretary of state under President Reagan would feel completely secure in their position as his chief foreign policy advisor. Combined with the 'unofficial' power of the troika, the potential for increased White House involvement in foreign policy seems to have been present from the beginning of the administration.

### ***Coordination problems***

In Reagan's first year, foreign policy-making suffered from one major bureaucratic weakness, a lack of coordination. This in large part stemmed from Reagan's decisions to downgrade the role of the national security

advisor and implement an interagency approach to foreign policy making. As discussed in Chapter 2, the actual influence exerted by a national security advisor in large part stems from his personal relationship with the president. The NSC was created to help the coordination of foreign and national security policy. As the head of the NSC staff, the national security advisor has a vital role to play in coordinating the departments and agencies involved in formulating foreign policy. To do this, the national security advisor requires both access to and the support of the president. In the case of Richard Allen, Reagan's first national security advisor, he had neither. The president had publicly stated that he was downgrading the role of the national security advisor and they would be forced to report to the president through the White House councillor, Edwin Meese. Without the support of the president, Allen was in no position to exert any influence over the departments and agencies involved in foreign policy. Indeed, Lou Cannon has claimed that Allen's main task as NSA seemed to be trying to 'shove decision documents and position papers' down the 'funnel-like management system that Meese had created to spare Reagan from decision-making'.<sup>49</sup> Not only was Allen unable to do his job, but Meese was able to interfere in the process and make it almost impossible for Allen to execute his tasks properly. This is just one example of the extent to which Reagan's decision to grant such a degree of power to his troika had a detrimental effect on policy-making. However, by placing the NSC in such a central position, Reagan left open the possibility of increasing the role of the NSA, if he chose to do so. With the difficulties experienced during Allen's time in office it seemed inevitable that such a change would be made.

In fact, Reagan made two important changes. The first was to replace Allen with William Clark, an associate of Reagan's since his time as governor of California. The second was to promote the NSA, allowing him to report directly to Reagan without having to go through the White House counsellor. Edmund Morris, Reagan's official biographer, has stated that Clark had an unusually close relationship with Reagan, both personally and professionally. He claims that Clark was granted almost unlimited access to the president. Whereas Allen struggled to get papers to the president to read, Clark was able to walk into Reagan's office without making an appointment.<sup>50</sup>

The sudden change in relationship between the president and his NSA may have been prompted by a bureaucratic inefficiency that required adjustment, but in large part it was also a result of the close personal relationship that existed between the two men. Robert McFarlane, Clark's deputy NSA, observed that Clark 'was closer to the president than anyone' in the government.<sup>51</sup> Morris has written that Clark was 'the only man who ever got within a furlong of intimacy' with the president.<sup>52</sup> Clark himself seemed aware of the unique position he found himself in, claiming that when Reagan 'came into the room, as governor or president, he didn't need to say anything, I could tell what he wanted'.<sup>53</sup> Clark was able to exploit his influence in two ways. First, he increased the size of the staff working in the NSC to its largest since Kissinger's time in office. This provided Clark with the institutional muscle he

required to carry out his duty as coordinator of policy. Second, Clark was able to use his access to the president to reconfigure the role of the NSA. Instead of acting as a mere 'honest broker' between the competing bureaucratic voices involved in foreign policy-making, Clark began to involve himself in the formulation of foreign policy, presenting his ideas as an equal to the cabinet and agency heads, in much the same fashion as his predecessors in the Nixon and Kennedy administrations. Thus, 'by the summer of 1983, Clark was widely regarded as having become the most influential foreign policy figure in the White House'.<sup>54</sup>

This left Alexander Haig, Reagan's secretary of state, in an unhappy position. He had been promised the lead role in foreign policy and a cabinet style of government. Instead, he found himself facing a rival in the White House who had both access to and a close personal relationship with the president. Foreign policy was increasingly being centralised in the White House, placing the secretary of state at a distinct institutional disadvantage. Haig's troubles were not just bureaucratic, but also personal and ideological. He did not share the same worldview as Reagan. Whereas Reagan viewed the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire', with which the US must engage in a moralistic crusade for freedom, Haig viewed the world as a traditional realist. The Cold War was a geostrategic conflict where US foreign policy must be geared towards shaping the balance of power in favour of US national interest.<sup>55</sup> There was also a widely held view within the administration that Haig was power-hungry and determined to dominate the foreign policy-making process. Having clashed with the president on Central American policy, public pronouncements on Soviet policy and the conflict in Lebanon, Reagan felt that he could no longer work with Haig as secretary of state. On 5 July 1982, Reagan asked Haig to resign and replaced him with George Shultz.<sup>56</sup>

The appointment of Shultz produced a better working relationship with Reagan. First and foremost Shultz was loyal to the president and told him explicitly how he viewed the role of secretary of state: 'I consider myself to be part of the White House and your team. I'm working for you, Mr President. I'll make use of the talent at the State Department to get our job done'.<sup>57</sup> Shultz came to the job with the view that his primary job as secretary of state was to serve the president:

A cabinet department is organized around the secretary and the programs of the department. The secretary is the boss. The White House is organized around the president, and from what I have seen of the White House in different administrations, it is an egocentric kind of operation that varies tremendously from one president to another, as each puts on it his own personal stamp. Everyone in the White House is staff to the president.<sup>58</sup>

If Shultz's memoirs are to be believed, then he came to the office without Haig's desire for pre-eminence. He realised he was part of a team and he

wished to work within that team as best he could to serve Reagan and his agenda. However, very quickly Reagan established a strong working relationship with Shultz. In August of 1983 he arranged to hold regular private meetings with Shultz to discuss foreign policy issues, without the input of the NSA.<sup>59</sup> As Shultz recounts:

My private meetings with the president were crucial, I knew. But I also knew that there was no effective presidential policy without a supportive staff. I had to help the president make the NSC process work. Making the process work was the only way to explore the issues fully and to examine the alternatives carefully.<sup>60</sup>

Having attempted to clear up the bureaucratic difficulties his administration had experienced by replacing Allen with Clark, Reagan was now sowing the seeds for further problems in future. Clark had managed to place himself at the forefront of the president's foreign policy team, but now the president was beginning to grant favour to Shultz, even to the extent of cutting Clark out of policy discussions. This clearly demonstrates the direct influence a president can have on the procedural aspects of foreign policy. Reagan seemed to be either confused about how he wanted his administration to be run, or he was unaware of the negative impact he was having on operational procedures. He had begun with the promise of a secretary of state-led cabinet-based foreign policy, only to move away from this ideal by slowly centralising foreign policy within the White House-based NSC. He finally seemed to accept the need for an increased role for the NSA and allowed Clark to step up and exert a strong policy-formulating role, only to appoint Shultz and appear to move more responsibility to the secretary of state. What Reagan had failed to do was offer (as far as is it possible) a strict demarcation between the roles he expected his NSA and secretary of state to play. From this confused origin it is little wonder that serious divides opened up in the second term over both procedural and substantive aspects of foreign policy.

The purpose of this discussion is not to chart the rise and fall of individual policy-makers in the Reagan administration. This will be done to an extent in the case study. Instead, our goal here is to analyse the role played by President Reagan in the functioning of the executive, and the impact this had on the procedural aspect of foreign policy-making during his time in office. What is clear to see is that Reagan did not fully understand the link between the White House staff and the wider foreign policy bureaucracy, nor did he seem to fully appreciate the personal power he wielded as president and how the closeness of his relationship with policy-makers influenced their ability to wield bureaucratic power. Reagan's management style will be analysed in greater detail in the next section, but some final remarks on Reagan's structuring of his foreign policy-making apparatus are required. Although he professed to have a clear vision of how he wanted foreign policy to be run, it is obvious from his actions during his first term that he did not. The underlying

issues between the State Department and the NSC were not resolved, and this proved to have negative consequences for effective foreign policy-making and the administration's ability to pursue Reagan's chosen goals, let alone his desire that his team speak with 'one voice'.

### **Reagan's management style**

Having analysed how Reagan attempted to structure his executive, it is now important to look at how the president himself operated within that structure. To do so it is necessary to look at Reagan's management style. What will become clear is that while there may be nearly universal agreement amongst both scholars and members of his administration on what methods Reagan used, there is a significant division as to whether his management style produced a positive or negative effect on US foreign policy-making.

#### ***Decision-making and delegation***

Reagan was a very complicated individual who offered many contradictions. His advisors have spoken of their ability to work with him day-to-day in a professional capacity because of his warm and friendly nature. However, they found it difficult to form any sort of close personal relationship with him. It was often impossible to know what the president was thinking until he told them.<sup>61</sup> He had an inner-self confidence that was cultivated during his years as an actor, and his skills as a negotiator were honed while working as a union representative in Hollywood. He was able to bargain effectively in the most heated of meetings with Soviet leaders, but he became very uncomfortable when faced with disagreements amongst his advisors.<sup>62</sup>

As a result, Reagan brought to the Oval Office a distinct style of management. He viewed himself as responsible for setting the political agenda of his administration. It was his role as president to establish the broad strategic framework that he wanted his presidency to pursue, and he was to use the power of his office to explain this choice of direction to both the electorate and his staff. He would then delegate authority to his staff to work out the finer details of how these objectives would be achieved. His staff would be responsible for formulating the specific policy options they believed would achieve Reagan's chosen goal. They would then present these options to Reagan and it would be his prerogative as commander-in-chief to make the final decision. In his very first NSC meeting Reagan explicitly stated how he wished foreign policy-making to be conducted during his administration: 'I will use the NSC structure to obtain your guidance, but I will make the decisions. Once made, I expect the Departments to implement them'.<sup>63</sup> Reagan also wished it to be known publicly how he viewed himself as president. In an interview with *Forbes* magazine he explained how his system of decision-making operated:



In the Cabinet meetings ... I use a system in which I want to hear what everybody wants to say honestly. I want the decisions made on what is right or wrong, what is good or bad for the people of this country. I encourage all the input that I can get ... And when I've heard all that I need to make a decision, I don't take a vote. I make the decision. Then I expect every one of them, whether their views have carried the day or not, to go forward together in carrying out the policy.<sup>64</sup>

Most observers noted that Reagan appeared comfortable making decisions and that when his mind was made up he stayed true to his convictions. George Shultz has written that Reagan 'is comfortable with himself. He is decisive, he steps up to things, and when he decides, he stays with it. And sometimes you wish he wouldn't, but anyway, he does. He is very decisive, and he's very strong'.<sup>65</sup> All presidents need to make the final decision, but not all of them have been comfortable doing so. Reagan's ability to make decisions, and feel at ease while doing so, has to be regarded as a positive aspect of his administration. However, like so many of the other contradictions in evidence during his presidency, his ease at making decisions papered over several serious problems.

The first of these stemmed from his delegation of authority to his subordinates. Reagan adopted an infamous 'hands-off' approach to the running of his administration. Once he had settled on a policy, it was up to the rest of the executive to implement his decision and then evaluate the policy as and when required. Reagan might have genuinely believed this was the most effective way to ensure high-quality policy-making, but it is clear that it also stemmed from some personal weaknesses in Reagan. He had to delegate so much authority because he had little understanding of the complex details involved in policy-making. Evidence of such lack of knowledge is well known, but perhaps the most famous example was his inability to comprehend the logic of nuclear deterrence and why this meant the Soviet Union would not agree to Reagan's development of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI).<sup>66</sup> Reagan was also very reluctant to involve himself in the search for policy alternatives. Thus, when he was presented with a decision to make, he rarely questioned how these options had been developed or what the underlying bureaucratic consensus was in relation to these options. Neustadt has suggested Reagan 'seems to have combined less intellectual curiosity, less interest in detail, than any president at least since Calvin Coolidge, with more initial and sustained commitments, more convictions independent of events or evidence, than any president since Wilson championed the League'.<sup>67</sup> The sheer extent of Reagan's delegation is also worthy of note. Neustadt draws an important comparison with Franklin Roosevelt, who was well known for delegating authority to subordinates: 'FDR's delegations were time limited and shifting; what Roosevelt gave he took back on notice', whereas 'Reagan, it seems, could delegate blindly year after year. The one man evidently knew what he was delegating and conducted himself accordingly; the other may

have had little or no idea'.<sup>68</sup> The combination of a strongly held worldview, lack of knowledge and delegation of authority clearly has the potential for ineffective policy-making.

A second problem resulted from the combination of Reagan's foreign policy-making system and his management style. As discussed previously, Reagan initiated a system of foreign policy-making whereby authority was centralised in a White House-based NSC system. However, he had not clearly defined the roles he wished his secretary of state and national security advisor to play in his administration. By delegating power to both of these individuals and asking them to formulate the specifics of policy based on his decisions, it was almost inevitable that severe disagreements would arise between the two foreign policy advisors over how best to implement the president's orders. Bureaucratic disagreements will obviously take place in any form of government. However, the impact of these disputes can be reduced by strong leadership from the chief executive. As we have discussed, Reagan was unwilling to involve himself in the day-to-day running of foreign policy so he was unlikely to resolve these disputes. The problem was confounded by a particularly debilitating trait of Reagan's. He became very uncomfortable when faced with disagreement and conflict amongst his chief advisors. As Neustadt has argued, 'Reagan hated conflict amongst his "fellas". He had no wish to watch them squirm, and he was modestly aware that his lack of detail often left him without the wherewithal for resolution'.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, so aware was Reagan of this weakness in his character and management style that he developed a tactic to help him avoid these problems. Whether in public speeches or in private meetings Reagan would tell stories and use anecdotes in the hope of deflecting attention away from his shortcomings. James Mann recounts: 'As [Brent] Stowcroft and countless other visitors had discovered, Reagan's almost compulsive habit of telling stories served the purposes of avoiding confrontation, overcoming bureaucratic disputes, and steering clear of the finer points of policy, in which Reagan often was not well versed'.<sup>70</sup> This however, could only ever serve as a delaying tactic. The underlying issues would not go away. At best this could only buy time for the disputing parties to eventually resolve the issues themselves.

In his memoirs, George Shultz recounts one particularly telling incident. He had complained bitterly to Reagan about NSDD 276, which had established the NSA as chairman of the inter-agency process. Shultz felt aggrieved that a member of the White House staff had been placed in a position of authority above the statutory NSC members, including cabinet heads like himself. Shultz had raised a legitimate procedural question but even before he received a formal reply from Reagan he 'could see that President Reagan was not interested in what he regarded as a bureaucratic struggle'.<sup>71</sup> The president eventually responded to Shultz's concerns in a letter:

None of the arrangements put in place by NSDD 276 will be at the cost of your authority or that of any other members of my cabinet. It is

important to note that the committees chaired by the National Security Advisor and his deputy are not freestanding groups, but instead feeder systems for the NSC and NSPG which I chair.<sup>72</sup>

Reagan felt this response would clarify the situation. Unfortunately, Shultz did not understand fully what the president was ordering, 'I wasn't sure what the president's message to me meant. I decided that he was encouraging my instinct simply to ignore the directive'.<sup>73</sup> This is a clear example of Reagan's failure to set forth a clearly defined policy-making structure and his inability to settle disputes between his advisors. It is also important to note that to this point the analysis has focused purely on the procedural aspects of foreign policy-making under Reagan. As will be discussed in the Nicaragua case study, these underlying procedural issues would have a debilitating impact on the substance of Reagan's foreign policy. The main problem to arise was that, without clear presidential intervention to provide guidance, the various bureaucratic players were forced to interpret Reagan's instructions and carry out the policies that they thought Reagan wanted. If there was a general consensus as to what Reagan wanted then the system could function well, such as in the case of Reagan's first term economic and military policies. However, if there was disagreement then disasters, such as Iran-Contra, became increasingly likely. As John Dumbrell has argued, 'At worst, what Richard Perle called Reagan's extreme "intellectual delegation of authority" invited either bureaucratic chaos, or the pushing of policy far into the regions of unaccountability'.<sup>74</sup>

What will be highlighted in detail in the case study is the extent to which presidential involvement influences the foreign policy-making process. It is possible for a president to delegate authority and produce a coherent and successful foreign policy. But this depends on the president delegating the right amount of authority to the appropriate aides. If the reverse happens then it is essential for a president to either take back the authority he has delegated or be prepared to intervene at the correct moment to bring clarity and decisiveness back to the process. It is the president alone who can bring coherence to an administration in conflict with itself. As we shall see in the next section, Reagan struggled to achieve this consistently over the course of his administration.

### ***Divisions: hardliners and moderates***

Having set out his vision for both the policies he wanted to achieve (rollback) and the structure of government he wanted to operate (allegedly a formalist cabinet system), Reagan knew it was imperative that he appointed the right people to help him achieve his goals. More so than any previous president, Reagan used his power of appointment to staff his administration with individuals who were loyal to him, his office and his policy programme. Peter Rodman was a Reagan appointee in the State Department and has written about his involvement in Reagan's appointment process:

A staff of one hundred in the White House screened candidates for philosophy as well as competence and integrity. The Reagan team is widely regarded as having had more success than most preceding administrations in shaping the leadership of the bureaucracy by these means.<sup>75</sup>

Reagan wanted to surround himself with figures of a suitably conservative political outlook. In particular, he expected his foreign policy team to share his worldview that the international system was characterised by a zero-sum logic, and that the Soviet Union was the primary global rival of the US. However, as discussed previously, Reagan was not a realist. He did not view the world solely in terms of power relations. Reagan expected his subordinates to share his ideological and moralistic view of international politics. The US was inherently a source of good in the world, whereas the Soviet Union was viewed as an 'evil empire' which was the chief instigator of violence and disorder.

As a result of this, Reagan relied heavily on conservative veterans of the Nixon and Ford administrations, as well as members of the increasingly influential neoconservative movement.<sup>76</sup> He filled his foreign policy cabinet posts and the highest levels of his White House staff with fellow ideologues. National Security Advisors Richard Allen and William Clark, Secretary of Defence Casper Weinberger, Director of Central Intelligence William Casey, United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and White House Counsellor Edwin Meese all shared Reagan's view of international politics, US foreign policy and the threat posed by the Soviet Union. As discussed previously, Alexander Haig viewed the Soviet Union as the biggest threat to the US, but this was based on a traditional realist worldview, not in political ideological terms. Mark Lagon has argued that, 'Members of Reagan's inner circle consciously saw each other as allies labouring to keep the administration faithful to what they saw as its ideological agenda'.<sup>77</sup> It was from the combined efforts of Reagan and these aides that the Reagan Doctrine was formulated.

However, although there was agreement amongst Reagan's policy-making team regarding the fact that the Soviet Union was the primary rival of the US and that it posed a security threat, there were significant differences in the administration regarding the severity of the threat posed and the methods that were required to meet the threat. Over the course of Reagan's term in office a deep ideological divide opened up within his administration, splitting his foreign policy team into two rival camps.

The group detailed above became known as the hardliners. They believed that the Soviet Union had exploited the era of détente to aggressively expand their influence in the developing world. The hardliners believed that this posed a serious threat to the national security interests of the US, and it was imperative that US foreign policy be directed to aggressively respond to Soviet provocations. As James Scott has argued: 'Driven by a conservative ideological interpretation of international developments and opportunities, this faction viewed any retreat from this purpose or the use of diplomacy in conjunction with the Reagan Doctrine as a sell-out to communism'.<sup>78</sup> For the

hardliners, diplomacy in this context was useless and had to be rejected in favour of direct intervention in the target third world countries.

The second group became known as the moderates. Included in its ranks were Secretary of State Shultz, Chief-of-Staff James Baker and Deputy Chief-of-Staff Michael Deaver, as well as other State Department officials such as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas Enders. These officials agreed that the spread of communism in the third world posed a threat to the US, but they believed that Reagan Doctrine intervention was only part of a broader strategy that included diplomacy in the hope of settling regional conflicts peacefully.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, Shultz became famous for his belief that the US should develop a dual-track strategy: 'We needed strength and diplomacy in our policy: strength to show the communists that we would not tolerate their advance into our hemisphere and diplomacy to pry the way open for solutions short of war'.<sup>80</sup> This split in the administration would have serious repercussions for the formulation and implementation of policy in Nicaragua, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **Conclusion**

Reagan demonstrates the extent to which the worldview and management style of the president impact on the functioning of foreign policy-making in the US, both positively and negatively, producing intended and unintended consequences. The life experience of Ronald Reagan had shaped a president who viewed the Soviet Union as the greatest evil in the modern world. Reagan saw the Soviet Union both as a geostrategic rival and the ideological and moral enemy of the US. As a result, Reagan believed it was the duty of the US to stand up to the Soviet Union and to work towards the end of communism and the Evil Empire. To do this, Reagan rejected the policy of containment that had formed the conceptual basis of US foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. Reagan wanted to take the US in a more aggressive direction that would begin to challenge the existence of the Soviet Union by trying to 'rollback' the gains that the USSR had made in the previous decade. Reagan believed that if he was successful in this policy then it would be only a matter of time before the Soviet Union would crumble from within and democracy and capitalism would replace the tyranny of central planning and authoritarianism. This was, of course, Reagan's longest of long-term goals, an objective that even his most loyal of supporters would acknowledge was an ambition tempered by the realities of international politics. But it is important to realise that this was the worldview and goal that motivated Reagan, which provides us with the conceptual lens through which to view the Nicaragua case study in the following chapter.

However, Reagan's weaknesses as a manager directly contributed to the bureaucratic chaos that would become the hallmark of his foreign policy. In particular, Reagan was never able to resolve the tensions between the State Department and the National Security Council. This institutional conflict was

personified by the rivalries that existed between the secretaries of state and national security advisors across all eight years of the Reagan administration. Reagan's inability to address these bureaucratic problems was a result of the limitations of his management style and had a negative impact on both the procedural and substantive dimensions of US foreign policy. This will be demonstrated in the following chapter's case study of Reagan's Nicaragua policy.

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## 6 Reagan and Nicaragua

### Introduction

Reagan's Nicaragua policy has received an intense amount of scholarly interest as a result of the Iran-Contra affair.<sup>1</sup> The scandal resulted in a presidential commission, a congressional committee investigation and prosecutions as a result of independent counsel Lawrence Walsh.<sup>2</sup> It produced the largest constitutional crisis since the Watergate scandal, with legal scholar Louis Fisher going so far to describe Iran-Contra as 'a stunning collapse of democratic government'.<sup>3</sup> Debate over the extent of presidential power in foreign policy-making and the failure of Congress to actively check the executive once again resurrected the idea of an 'imperial' presidency: 'Whatever else may be said about Ronald Reagan, he quickly showed that the reports of the death of the Presidency were greatly exaggerated'.<sup>4</sup>

However, the Iran-Contra scandal is but one aspect of Reagan's Nicaragua policy and only forms part of the justification for the selection of this particular policy as a case study. This book is analysing the role of the president in US foreign policy. Having looked at the role of Truman in the formulation of the US strategy of containment and the application of this strategy in Korea, we will now analyse Reagan's role in the application of the strategy of 'roll-back' in Nicaragua. Why did Reagan pursue the Contra policy with such rigour, even in the face of congressional opposition? Where did the policy to search for alternative sources of funding originate? What role did Reagan's worldview and management style play in the development of the policy? Why did the president take such risks in terms of securing external funding? The chapter argues that although Reagan was known for his detached style of management, which involved the delegation of power to his subordinates in the executive, in the areas of foreign policy that he deemed of utmost importance he was willing to involve himself in the formulation of policy and was prepared to exploit the powers of his office in attempting to achieve his desired goal. Nicaragua was one such area. Reagan viewed Nicaragua through the narrow filters of his anti-communism and as a result rated it as one of the most serious foreign and security policies facing his administration. He believed the Soviet Union and Cuba were using Nicaragua as a proxy for

communist intervention in Central America. As a result, he worked hard to keep Nicaragua at the top of his foreign policy agenda. This demonstrates the important role of presidential worldview in setting the US foreign policy agenda. However, when assessing the impact of presidential agency, it is important to recognise that unintended consequences can be just as important as intended outcomes. In the case of Reagan and Nicaragua, it will be shown that Reagan's proclivity for grand strategising and the search for simple solutions at the expense of grasping the finer details of policy-making, coupled with his hands-off management style, set his administration on the path towards the Iran–Contra scandal.

The choice of Nicaragua also allows us to analyse in detail the relationship between the president and congress in US foreign policy-making. Reagan never had the consistent support of a majority of congressmen on the issue of Nicaragua. Indeed, the policy remained one of the most controversial issues of his entire administration. Conservative Republicans agreed with Reagan on the threat posed by the Sandinista government and voted in favour of Contra funding. Liberal Democrats did not share Reagan's view and consistently voted against Contra aid. This left a minority of moderate Republican and conservative Democrats who Reagan had to try and win over in the run up to any vote on Contra funding and Nicaragua policy. This chapter will show how the president actively involved himself in the legislative battle to try and convince these legislators to vote in favour of his Contra policy. This proved to be a complex and painfully slow process that did achieve some success, but was never as successful as the president wished. Indeed, the process became more difficult with the administration's attempts to forge a policy with or without the consent of Congress. The launching of covert operations in Nicaragua, the ever increasing role of the CIA and the lack of administration cooperation with the relevant congressional oversight committees eventually culminated in the Iran-Contra scandal and the collapse of Reagan's Nicaragua policy.

### **Framing Nicaragua as a security concern**

Although Reagan's first term agenda was dominated by his attempts to pass his economic and military programmes, it was difficult for his administration to ignore the ongoing situation in Nicaragua. The left-wing Sandinistas had overthrown the US-backed right-wing Somoza regime the previous year. As staunch anti-communists, the mere possibility of the Sandinistas setting up a Marxist state structure in a country so close to the US was unacceptable. The fear of 'another Castro' was prevalent throughout the administration. In January 1980, the State Department circulated a briefing paper that began to formulate the administration's view of the situation in Central America, particularly their negative assessment of the role Cuba was playing in helping to spread socialism through the supply of economic and military aid.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of Nicaragua and Central America to the Reagan administration can be seen from the very first meeting of the National Security Council on 6 February 1981. The security concerns raised by events in the Caribbean Basin were deemed of enough importance to merit being placed at the top of the agenda, above even fears over increased Soviet intervention in Poland. Secretary Haig dominated the discussion as he attempted to establish Cuba as the source of major disruption in Central America. In his opening remarks he explained that: 'This region is our third border. There is no question that it is in turmoil ... Cuba exploits internal difficulties in these states by exporting arms and subversion'.<sup>6</sup> The main focus of the discussion was on the role played by Cuba and Nicaragua in exporting arms to revolutionary groups in El Salvador. The right-wing government of El Salvador was a key regional ally for the US and its survival was deemed of great importance to Reagan. Indeed, the president spoke openly of his desire to establish firmer relations with US allies in the region:

My own feeling – and one which I have talked about at length – is that we are way behind, perhaps decades, in establishing good relationships with the two Americas. We must change the attitude of our diplomatic corps so that we don't bring down governments in the name of human rights. None of them are as guilty of human rights violations as are Cuba and the USSR. We don't throw out our friends just because they can't pass the 'saliva test' on human rights. I want to see that stopped. We need people who recognise that philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Reagan was signalling clearly his intent to overhaul President Carter's human rights-based approach to foreign policy. This was a bold statement and outlined how Reagan viewed the world and how he wanted his foreign policy conducted. In terms of the narrower focus of the debate on Nicaragua and Central America, it was clear that the president wanted his administration to begin preparing to increase US involvement in the region.

At this stage the discussion remained focused on Cuba. Haig continued to outline what he saw as the threat posed by Cuban subversion and their continued supply of rebels throughout the region. He claimed to have evidence that over 600 tonnes of military material had been passed from Cuba to El Salvador via Nicaragua. The Sandinistas were involved in what Haig saw as the exporting of revolution. However, because of the large quantity of weapons being distributed, the working assumption was that Cuba was not acting alone and was, in fact, a proxy for the Soviet Union. This explains the Reagan administration's evaluation of the threat posed by Cuba and Nicaragua. The fear amongst Reagan and his officials was the potential of the Soviet Union gaining a foothold on the mainland of Central American. Haig wanted to cut off economic aid to Nicaragua to demonstrate that 'we will not tolerate violations as did the past Administration'.<sup>8</sup> Secretary of Defence Weinberger suggested that more could be achieved by using 'covert aid ... to

disrupt Cuban activities'.<sup>9</sup> He also pointed out that he was 'not sure that most Americans understand the situation there' and argued 'we need to explain to people that this is a dangerous situation for the US, and that we may have to move strongly'.<sup>10</sup> Reagan, however, was keen to focus on the situation currently faced. He asked, 'How can we intercept these weapons? How can we help?'.<sup>11</sup> The president's desire for US involvement stemmed from his belief that 'We can't afford a defeat'.<sup>12</sup> For Reagan, the idea of increased Soviet involvement in the region was unacceptable.

The minutes of the first NSC meeting are a remarkable document. They show the origin of many of the features that would eventually characterise perhaps the most controversial policy of the Reagan administration. The debate centred on the spread of communism in the region and the specific role played by Cuba. We see how the policy originates as an attempt to stop the Cubans and Nicaraguans sending weapons to Salvadorian guerrillas. The role of the president is also demonstrated as Reagan makes it clear that communist threats to regional US allies will not be tolerated and that his authority to respond to these threats will not be restricted by human rights considerations. This is a clear break from the Carter administration and signals Reagan's intention to take US foreign policy in a more aggressive and conservative direction. Weinberger expresses the fear that there is little public understanding of the threat posed by the Sandinistas. This is a rather pertinent observation given that over the course of his administration Reagan was never able to convince a majority of Americans to support his policy. Finally, the option of covert involvement was discussed. The eventual decision to implement a covert policy of aid to Nicaraguan rebels would set off a chain of events that resulted in the Iran-Contra scandal.

### *Deciding to intervene*

In the following months Reagan found it difficult to formulate options for a coherent policy. At NSC meetings Haig continued to champion aggressive action against Cuba. He discussed the possibility of quarantine and increased military options.<sup>13</sup> The rest of the administration was less keen on such hostile action. Robert McFarlane, an assistant to Haig, suggested that less attention should be paid to Cuba, and offered a dual-track solution based on isolating Nicaragua and initiating an economic development program for all the countries in the region.<sup>14</sup> This was based on the assumption that Nicaraguan and Cuban policies could not be implemented without understanding of the problems facing the region as a whole. The secretary of defence was also wary of increased direct US military involvement. In his memoirs, Haig writes that Weinberger 'genuinely feared the creation of another unmanageable tropical war into which American troops and American money would be poured with no result different from Vietnam'.<sup>15</sup> As Robert Kagan has argued, 'The Reagan administration's failure to settle on a policy, however, was understandable ... All the choices were politically and, in the views of

some, even strategically unattractive'.<sup>16</sup> The Reagan administration was confronted with the reality of formulating foreign policy in the post-Vietnam environment. There would be no public support for military involvement in Nicaragua, especially if the majority of the public did not share Reagan's perception of the level of threat posed by the Sandinistas.

### *Going covert*

The first important decisions made by Reagan in relation to Nicaragua and Central America were taken over the next two months. On 9 March, Reagan signed a presidential finding authorising covert aid to 'provide all forms of training, equipment and related assistance to cooperating governments throughout Central America in order to counter foreign sponsored subversion and terrorism'.<sup>17</sup> The primary goal of this order was to begin helping the El Salvador government interdict weapons being sent from Cuba via Nicaragua. Reagan also allowed a diplomatic mission, led by Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders, to be sent to Managua to meet with Sandinista leaders. The proposed deal was for the Sandinistas to end their support of guerrillas in neighbouring countries, and in return the US guaranteed not to threaten or use force against the Nicaraguan regime. However, the Sandinistas rejected the deal. Even if they had accepted, it is unlikely the agreement would have been finalised as the hardliners were unhappy with the terms. They found it unacceptable that Enders was proposing to accept the legitimacy of the Sandinista revolution in return for a cessation of arms trafficking. The hardliners demanded the removal of the communist and Soviet threat. With the failure of the diplomatic mission, Reagan ordered the suspension of aid to Nicaragua on 1 April.<sup>18</sup>

Over the summer, Reagan continued to receive briefings on what administration officials perceived to be the growing crisis in Nicaragua. Writing in his diary in October, Reagan explains that a meeting with the NSC 'has left me with the most profound decision I've ever had to make. Central America is really the world's next hotspot. Nicaragua is an armed camp supplied by Cuba and threatening a communist takeover of all of Central America'.<sup>19</sup> This diary entry shows how seriously Reagan believed the threat was in Nicaragua. For Reagan, the US had to act to counter this threat. Therefore Nicaragua had to remain a high-ranking priority on Reagan's foreign policy agenda. A month later at the 16 November meeting of the NSC, the restricted interagency group responsible for Central American policy presented Reagan with a set of options it had developed in relation to the growing problems in Nicaragua.<sup>20</sup> Secretary of State Haig continued to argue in favour of stronger direct action against Cuba, who he still thought of as the 'source' of instability in the region.<sup>21</sup> However, the rest of the NSC members were reluctant to endorse such a measure, fearing that it could provoke the Soviet Union into escalating the situation, and also wary that there would be little or no public support for such an aggressive act. Indeed, Enders recollects that during

discussions Reagan made it clear that he was 'profoundly adverse to violence'.<sup>22</sup> This meant it was unlikely that the president would sign off on any of Haig's more controversial policies.

An alternative to direct US involvement was required. If the fear was that Cuba and Nicaragua were smuggling arms to revolutionaries in El Salvador, then a method was needed to put a halt to this. At the 6 February NSC meeting the president had asked how the US could help stop the supply of guns. The Director of the CIA, William Casey, offered a covert solution. The Sandinistas were currently facing a domestic uprising, 'la contrarrevolucion', led by the 'Fuerza Democratica Nicaraguense', or Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN). Casey suggested that with the aid of the US, these rebel groups would be able to stem the flow of weapons from Nicaragua to El Salvador. The rebels could also be supplemented by a team of CIA operatives who would lead and direct paramilitary operations against the Sandinista regime.<sup>23</sup>

The president and his advisors agreed on this option. Without access to the minutes of this meeting, which are still classified, it is difficult to determine the strength of the agreement reached. Several members of the administration have since claimed that opinion was divided. Haig has claimed that the covert policy was chosen 'by default' and was a result of the failure of the 'policy-making apparatus'.<sup>24</sup> Rodman argues that the policy was the result of a 'bureaucratic compromise' between Haig, who wanted stronger action directed at Cuba, and Caspar Weinberger, who did not want to see the US military becoming entangled in another jungle conflict.<sup>25</sup> Reagan, on the other hand, seems to have been in favour of the decision. Writing in his diary on 17 November, he notes, 'We have decided on a plan of covert actions, etc. to block the Cuban aid to Nicaragua and El Salvador. There is no question but that all of Central America is targeted for a Communist takeover'.<sup>26</sup> Again this diary entry provides evidence to support the argument that Nicaragua was one of the top-ranking items on Reagan's foreign policy agenda. The president rated the issue as a severe security threat and as a result he wanted the US to take action. The president may have been unwilling to intervene directly, and he was certainly aware that public opinion would not support such a policy. As a result, the decision to intervene covertly became the obvious choice for Reagan.

On 17 November, President Reagan signed NSDD 17, which stated US policy is 'to assist in defeating the insurgency in El Salvador, and to oppose actions by Cuba, Nicaragua or others to introduce into Central America heavy weapons, troops from outside the region, trained subversives, or arms and military supplies for insurgents'.<sup>27</sup> As part of this strategy, Reagan authorised \$20 million of aid to be sent to the anti-Sandinista rebel groups.<sup>28</sup> On 1 December, Central American policy was discussed at another meeting of the NSC. The result of this meeting was a far more controversial decision. Reagan signed a presidential directive, which ordered the CIA to 'support and conduct ... paramilitary operations against ... Nicaragua'.<sup>29</sup> The finding authorised the CIA to send 500 operatives to Nicaragua.

A few days later, in line with the rules regarding presidential authorisation of covert activities, William Casey had to brief the House and Senate intelligence committees. Fearful of another Vietnam situation, Democrats on the House committee asked him about the level of American involvement, possible escalation, and what right the US had to overthrow the government of a foreign country. 'Nobody was talking about overthrowing anybody', explained Casey, 'This was a small, contained attempt to interdict weapons and to put just enough pressure on the Sandinistas to keep them from delivering their revolution wholly to communism'.<sup>30</sup> However, while stating that the purpose of US involvement was not to overthrow the Sandinista government, he failed to make it clear that the CIA would be responsible for interdicting the weapons, leaving the committee members to assume that the Contras would be performing this task.<sup>31</sup> This was the beginning of a series of inadequate congressional briefings that Casey would take part in, and which formed part of a larger administration strategy of limiting congressional knowledge of the executive's conduct of policy in Nicaragua.

The events discussed above are worthy of note for several reasons. They demonstrate the extent to which the administration was working in response to the agenda set by President Reagan. The events of the Sandinista revolution and their consolidation of power were viewed solely in terms of the East-West superpower conflict, both by Reagan and the majority of his most senior advisors. This highlights the role of presidential worldview, as Reagan made his decisions on the basis of this perception of the Nicaraguan situation. For Reagan, the Sandinistas were communist proxies controlled by the Soviet Union. The fact that the revolution was taking place on the North American mainland intensified what was seen as communist aggression in America's traditional sphere of hegemonic interest. Reagan made it clear that this had to be stopped. The decision to involve the CIA covertly may have been the result of a compromise, but this was a compromise of methods, not objectives. According to Thomas Enders the decision to go covert was intended as 'the low-ball option',<sup>32</sup> but the use of the CIA allowed the policy to be centralised in the White House whilst affording Congress the least amount of involvement possible.

Having been elected as a staunch anti-communist and committed cold warrior, the decision to back the anti-Sandinista forces and send the CIA to intervene in Nicaragua had placed both Reagan and his administration on a course of action that would be difficult to deviate from. First, by committing to the Contras, Reagan believed any attempt to lessen US support would appear to Sandinistas and Moscow as a sign of weakness. As Reagan viewed the world in East-West and zero-sum terms, he could not back down from supporting the Contras as this would result in a loss for the US and a gain for the Soviet Union. As a result, it was almost inevitable that the US would have to involve itself in Nicaragua to an ever-greater degree. This was shown in the development of the CIA's mission from merely interdicting weapons, to increased paramilitary operations directed at pressurising the Sandinista



government towards political reform, to alleged attempts at direct overthrow of the Nicaraguan government. Second, this had a direct consequence for the possibility of a diplomatic solution. As Reagan became more concerned with political reform and his 'crusade for freedom', the increasing involvement of the CIA made it difficult for the diplomats to pursue a peaceful negotiated settlement.

### *The conflict intensifies*

In 1982 there were several important developments. The increase of US supplies and CIA involvement in Nicaragua began to have an effect on the size and efficiency of the anti-Sandinista forces. As Kornbluh has written, 'Whereas actions by small isolated bands of Somocista guardsmen had been previously limited to sporadic, ineffectual incidents along the border region, with the influx of US personnel, equipment, and money the frequency and destructiveness of the contra attacks escalated rapidly'.<sup>33</sup> As a result, news of the US's covert involvement in Nicaragua began to appear in the media.<sup>34</sup> The most visible Contra attack occurred in March, when anti-Sandinista forces trained by the CIA in the use of explosives demolished two bridges in northern Nicaragua.<sup>35</sup> What had initially begun as a policy of interdicting arms destined for El Salvador, was now developing into a broader strategy focused on applying covert military pressure to the Sandinista government. This change was in part a result of a covert operation initiated with a broad and ill-defined mandate as expressed in the presidential finding of 1 December, but was also in part as a result of the developments taking place in the ideological orientation of Reagan.

At his 24 February speech to the Organisation of American States, Reagan drew a contrast between the light of democracy and the darkness of totalitarianism in Central America:

The positive opportunity is illustrated by the two-thirds of the nations in the area which have democratic governments. The dark future is fore-shadowed by the poverty and repression of Castro's Cuba, the tightening grip of the totalitarian left in Grenada and Nicaragua, and the expansion of Soviet-backed, Cuban-managed support for violent revolution in Central America.<sup>36</sup>

Reagan went on to outline that US security assistance to Central America was not an end in itself, but the means towards the greater goal of democracy and freedom. By publicly attacking the Sandinistas and explaining that the US sought the spread of democracy in Central America, Reagan was laying the foundation for the Reagan Doctrine at a rhetoric level and serving notice to Nicaragua that the US policy of interdicting arms was only the beginning of a strategy that would eventually demand the reform of the Sandinista regime. Kagan has argued, 'The Reagan Doctrine began as an act of political salesmanship. It wrapped a conservative Republican president's aggressive anti-communist strategy in a broader cloak that appealed to moderate

Democrats while it confounded liberals'.<sup>37</sup> The president may have been trying to sell his Nicaragua policy, but the combination of increasingly violent and public 'covert' acts combined with an ideological call for democracy promotion began to raise serious concerns within the moderate elements of his administration and began to attract the attention of Congress.

The moderates, led by Thomas Enders, were troubled by what they saw as a disparity between means and ends. If Reagan sought the overthrow of the Sandinistas and the establishment of democracy in Nicaragua, then support of the Contras would not achieve this. The Contras were becoming larger and more effective, but they lacked the capabilities and domestic support necessary to have any real hope of achieving a revolution, let alone a democratic revolution, as Reagan controversially claimed.<sup>38</sup> If Reagan wanted to use the Contras as a tool to achieve democracy in Nicaragua then this decision 'was to embark on a policy with no foreseeable end and no prospect of success'.<sup>39</sup> Enders, along with others in the State Department, knew that paramilitary operations alone would not achieve the president's desired result. Indeed, the diplomats believed that it was wrong to view the Contras as an end in themselves. Enders desired to reopen negotiations with the Sandinistas in the hope of avoiding an unnecessary escalation in a region of such strategic importance for the US. The Contras had a role to play, but this was as part of a larger diplomatic initiative. Enders suggested that he should pursue negotiations with the Sandinistas where the Contras should be used as a bargaining chip. If the Sandinistas were prepared to meet US demands in relation to arms trafficking, democracy and economic freedom, then the US would be willing to stop supporting the Contras in return. However, this proved a fruitless endeavour. The hardliners were unwilling to negotiate along these lines, and were not prepared to stop US support of the Contras.<sup>40</sup> Reagan agreed, and the Contras continued to be the focal point of US policy in Nicaragua.

### *Congress responds*

With the covert policy becoming ever more public, it was unsurprising that members of Congress began to investigate the policy and raise objections in relation to both the stated ends and the controversial means that had been adopted by the Reagan administration. When news of the US's involvement in the Contra attacks first broke in March 1982, there was surprisingly little in the way of conflict between the branches of government over the president's classification of the Sandinistas as Marxist-Leninists actively engaged in the export of terrorism and revolution throughout the region. On 2 March, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Barry Goldwater, announced publicly that there was 'no doubt that there is active involvement by Sandinista government officials in support of the Salvadoran guerrilla movement'.<sup>41</sup>

The major disagreement at this stage centred on the administration's support for the Contras. Like the moderates in the State Department, voices of concern were raised by members of the intelligence committees in both

houses of Congress in relation to the belief that covert funding of the Contras would achieve the administration's goals of stopping arms flowing from Nicaragua to El Salvador. Committee members also pointed out the difficulty the administration would have controlling the Contras, and raised concerns that the situation in Nicaragua could escalate, with the possibility of war between Nicaragua and Honduras, where the Contras had bases.<sup>42</sup> Opposition was also strengthened because only the intelligence committees had been briefed on operations in Nicaragua, the rest of the Congress did not have access to this information. Therefore, without knowing the full details of the policy, the majority of Congress was forced to rely on press reports for information. As a result, they were presented with images of CIA operatives appearing to do more than just interdicting arms. Reports were received of the Contras attacking roads, bridges and fuel tanks, engaging in assassination of government, health and education officials as well as economic targets in both industry and agriculture.<sup>43</sup> Members of Congress therefore found it difficult to accept the Reagan administration's argument that the aim of US policy in Nicaragua was to stop arms trafficking. The increasing violence of the Contras suggested that their aims were differing from those of Reagan. Many members of Congress became wary that the US was supporting an armed movement whose true aim was to overthrow the Sandinista regime. For these Congressmen, such a policy was unacceptable. Senators Dodd and Tsongas called the Nicaragua policy 'as confused as it is dangerous'.<sup>44</sup>

This prompted several congressional initiatives to place restrictions on Reagan's policy in Nicaragua. Congressman Michael Barnes made the first attempt. He introduced a bill in the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs which, if it had passed, would have halted all covert actions throughout the whole of Central America.<sup>45</sup> The second attempt was made in the summer by Edward Boland and the House Intelligence Committee. In a classified annexe to the intelligence authorization bill, the committee declared that none of the funds appropriated could be used 'for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provoking an exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras'.<sup>46</sup> The annexe to the bill would have remained classified if it were not for two related events. Over the winter, the Contras increased their activities as a result of increased numbers and funding, and, because of increased media attention in the region, these incidents were publicised in the US media.<sup>47</sup> This prompted representative Tom Harkin to offer an amendment to the defence appropriations bill that would prohibit US funds and support for all paramilitary and covert activities in or against Nicaragua. This attempt at sweeping restriction prompted the House Intelligence Committee chairman, Edward Boland, to offer his own previously classified amendment, which prohibited the use of funds for the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government and stipulated that Contra aid could only be used for the purpose of arms interdiction.<sup>48</sup> The Boland Amendment passed by a vote of 411 to 0 and the president signed the bill on 21 December 1982.

### **Reagan re-asserts**

Congress had attempted to place restrictions on Reagan's Nicaragua policy. However, the president was unwilling to compromise on what he viewed as one of the most important foreign policy issues facing his administration. Even before Congress had passed the defence appropriations bill, Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 59, titled 'Cuba and Central America', whereby the current policy of providing cover support to Nicaraguan paramilitary fighters was reaffirmed.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the Boland amendment might have been an attempt by Congress to signal to the president their concerns over the direction he was taking US policy, but Reagan was adamant that he would continue as planned. By late February 1983, Reagan and his national security planning group were already working on a new draft presidential finding in relation to Nicaragua policy. The plan was for the CIA to 'work with ... organisations and individuals to build popular support ... that will be nationalistic, anti-Cuban and anti-Somoza' and 'support and protect the opposition ... by developing and training action teams that will ... engage in paramilitary operations'.<sup>50</sup> Reagan clearly intended to continue supporting the Contras even if congressional opposition was rising. He was also willing to expand his programme and involve himself personally in the process.

Reagan and the hardliners were working on the assumption that there was domestic opposition to the Contra policy because the general population were uninformed of the situation in Nicaragua, and that they did not have enough details to form a more balanced opinion. The only reports the public read were in newspapers, and much like their congressmen, they were not happy to see the US involve itself in what appeared to be another jungle conflict with no discernible end goal. Reagan ordered that the administration must engage in an extensive public diplomacy initiative, even going so far as to appoint an 'overall coordinator who will be responsible for the development and implementation of a public diplomacy strategy' to 'deepen the understanding and support for our policies in Central America' whilst focusing 'not only in the developments in Central America but also on the impact that these activities have in Latin America as well as elsewhere overseas and in the United States'.<sup>51</sup> Reagan hoped that by increasing public awareness of the situation in Nicaragua, particularly the administration's assessment of the threat posed by the Sandinistas, he would be able to convince enough members of the public to support his agenda and in turn he could use this to his advantage when dealing with Congress.<sup>52</sup>

While the foundations of a concerted bureaucratic public diplomacy campaign were being laid, Reagan decided to place himself at the forefront. On 27 April he delivered an address to a joint session of Congress on the topic of Central America. The usual themes were repeated, Nicaragua was a communist state and it was responsible for the spread of revolutionary movements throughout Central America. However, Reagan now wanted to make it

abundantly clear just how close this threat was to the borders of the US, and the extent to which the American public underestimated the extent of the problem: 'El Salvador is nearer to Texas than Texas is to Massachusetts. Nicaragua is just as close to Miami, San Antonio, San Diego, and Tucson as those cities are to Washington, where we're gathered tonight'.<sup>53</sup> Reagan then proceeded to outline what he viewed as the major strategic threat facing US security in the region:

But nearness on the map doesn't even begin to tell the strategic importance of Central America, bordering as it does on the Caribbean – our lifeline to the outside world. Two-thirds of all our foreign trade and petroleum pass through the Panama Canal and the Caribbean. In a European crisis at least half of our supplies for NATO would go through these areas by sea. It's well to remember that in early 1942, a handful of Hitler's submarines sank more tonnage there than in all of the Atlantic Ocean. And they did this without a single naval base anywhere in the area. And today, the situation is different. Cuba is host to a Soviet combat brigade, a submarine base capable of servicing Soviet submarines, and military air bases visited regularly by Soviet military aircraft.<sup>54</sup>

Reagan was trying to paint a vivid picture of Soviet incursion closer to the United States than anything the Nazis had accomplished during the Second World War. Reagan was attempting to turn the debate on Nicaragua into a domestic issue rather than an abstract foreign policy that had little impact on the day-to-day lives of the average citizen.<sup>55</sup>

This strategy proved successful in some respects, but produced unintended consequences that hampered the administration. First, Reagan was able to put members of Congress on the defensive. By posing the situation as a Soviet-backed communist threat to the wellbeing of the US, Reagan was able to challenge the patriotism and anti-communist credentials of Congressmen who questioned either the ends or the means of US policy in Nicaragua. These critics were 'compelled to demonstrate that they were just as resolute about standing up to communism in Central America, just as convinced of the threat, and just as opposed to the establishment of communist regimes in the hemisphere as were Reagan administration supporters'.<sup>56</sup> Reagan was able to combine both the power of his office and his vast personal popularity to push forward his agenda at the level of both rhetoric and policy-making. It would be over a year before Congress could again bring forward a serious attempt to check Reagan's support for the Contras.

However, this came at a cost for the administration. By setting forth on such a hostile course, Reagan turned Nicaragua into one of the most partisan issues to be fought during his time in office. Although Reagan had the support of conservative Republicans and Democrats, younger liberals in the Democratic Party were reluctant to repeat the mistakes of Vietnam and were not prepared to let Reagan and the CIA carry out a covert war against

Nicaragua.<sup>57</sup> These liberals would continually oppose Reagan at every opportunity, thus forcing Reagan to attempt to win over the remaining swing voters, whom he needed for a majority.

## **Reagan's management system failures**

### ***Divisions***

The overly ideological tone of Reagan's new advance also began to increase the division within the administration between the moderates and hardliners. Even before the president's speech, George Shultz, who had replaced Alexander Haig in July 1982 as secretary of state, recalls that the intensity of Nicaragua policy was increasing. As early as December, Bill Casey had written to Shultz arguing the case for the hardliners:

Our support in Congress is fading. We're in danger of losing on what is by far the most important foreign policy problem confronting the nation [Central America]. You shouldn't be travelling around Europe. You should be going around the United States sounding the alarm and generating support for tough policies on the most important problem on our agenda. Force is the only language the Communists understand.<sup>58</sup>

Shultz claims he was 'taken aback by his vehemence and by the emotion in his attack on me. Casey seemed suddenly obsessed with the issue'.<sup>59</sup> The division between the hardliners and the moderates focused more on means than on ends. To a large extent, Shultz agreed with the hardliners' assessment of the situation in Nicaragua, he believed that the Soviet Union was trying to gain a foothold on the American mainland to 'tie us down and preoccupy us right on our southern border in the hopes that we would not attend adequately to Soviet challenges in the farther reaches of the world'.<sup>60</sup> But as Kagan has argued, 'Implicit in Shultz's assessment, however, was a conviction that the Reagan administration should not do the Soviet Union's work by preoccupying itself with Central America and engaging in endless, divisive battles with the Democrats in Congress'.<sup>61</sup> The secretary of state did not view support of the Contras as sufficient to achieve the desired result in Nicaragua. He argued in favour of a dual-track policy of strength and diplomacy, whereby the Contras would act as military pressure driving the Sandinistas to the negotiating table.<sup>62</sup> The hardliners refused to accept this logic. They did not believe that it was possible to negotiate with communists. Casey, Kirkpatrick and Clark all believed that communists only entered into negotiations to buy time, or to force the US into accommodation.<sup>63</sup> As Casey had said in December, force was the only way the US would be able to deal with the communists, and that meant supporting the Contras.

The division within the administration went beyond ideology; it also developed into a bureaucratic dispute. The hardliners were concentrated

within the White House and NSC; the moderates were led by Shultz in the State Department. As discussed earlier, the Reagan foreign policy bureaucracy was centred in the NSC but the president developed a strong working relationship with Shultz. The tensions in this bureaucratic set-up soon became apparent in relation to Nicaragua policy. Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders had begun working on an initiative to involve Mexico and other countries in the region in a negotiated settlement. His proposal had the support of Shultz, but such a policy was unacceptable to William Clark and he worked hard to kill it. This sparked off a bitter dispute between the secretary of state and the national security advisor. Shultz 'accused Clark of a power-grab and Clark accused Shultz of bypassing an orderly inter-agency process by end runs into the Oval Office, denying the president the benefit of dissenting views'.<sup>64</sup> To some degree, both officials were correct in their accusations. Clark had been working with the support of Casey and Weinberger to centralise Nicaragua policy-making within the NSC, and Shultz had been exploiting his access to the president to discuss Nicaragua policy without other senior staff present.<sup>65</sup>

However, the president had made it clear over the previous two years that he considered the Nicaraguan situation to be one of his most important foreign policy issues, and he viewed support of the Contras as essential to US security. Even with a strong relationship with Shultz it was almost inevitable that he would side with the hardliners. Reagan decided to focus more aggressively on Nicaragua, and demanded an increase in US involvement. This took two forms. First, even though Congress had attempted to restrict the president's involvement in Nicaragua, Reagan began working towards increased American support for the Contras. In a memo to CIA Director Bill Casey, William Clark explains that the president approved an 'increased funding level for the Nicaraguan Covert Action Program' but that 'the President has deferred approval of your [Casey's] request to increase further the Nicaraguan resistance forces until we have available a detailed projection of the long term goals/objectives and costs for these forces'.<sup>66</sup> The president had also authorised increased Department of Defense support for the CIA's covert activities.<sup>67</sup> What this demonstrates is that Reagan was not rushing blindly to support the Contras. Instead, he was aware that his Nicaragua policy was becoming an increasingly visible and politicised policy and although he was prepared to fund existing Contra forces, he was not prepared at this stage to actively engage in their expansion. A larger force would be less covert and would result in increased opposition in Congress.

### ***Big Pine***

Reagan's second decision was to undo most of his previous careful planning. During May Reagan held a meeting on the subject of Nicaragua with Bill Casey and Henry Kissinger where they had discussed blockading Nicaragua to demonstrate to both the Sandinistas and the Soviet Union that the US

were taking events in the region very seriously.<sup>68</sup> Reagan again revisited this topic in a meeting with Senator Denton in July where they discussed the idea of the US working with regional allies to quarantine Nicaragua and halt the trafficking of arms from Nicaragua.<sup>69</sup> Reagan was clearly beginning to think about expanding his Nicaragua policy to include both covert and overt elements. The president wished to confront both the Soviet Union and the Sandinistas, whilst at the same time impressing his authority as commander-in-chief on opponents in Congress.

At the end of July, Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 100, authorising 'Big Pine II', a six-month long set of military exercises off both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of Nicaragua. The directive included some of the strongest language yet, not just in relation to the threat posed by the Sandinistas, but to the extent the US was willing to support her allies:

The democratic states of Central America must be assisted to the maximum degree possible in defending themselves against externally supported subversion or hostile neighbours. US military activities in the region must be significantly increased to demonstrate our willingness to defend our allies and to deter further Cuban and Soviet bloc intervention.<sup>70</sup>

Over three thousand American troops would conduct war games with the Honduran army on Honduran territory. The activities may have demonstrated to the intended foreign and congressional audience Reagan's intention, but this show of force came at a serious political cost, both within his administration and with Congress.

The decision to launch Big Pine was taken without the input of the secretary of state. Shultz has written that on hearing the news about the decision to launch the exercise he was left feeling 'totally blindsided, and I did not know the extent to which President Reagan had been involved. I knew that I had no chance to give him my views'.<sup>71</sup> This demonstrates the extent to which Reagan's foreign policy system lacked cohesion and was at the mercy of factional splits. A decision had been taken to send the US military to Honduras as a show of force to the Sandinistas and the Soviet Union, but the matter had not been discussed with the secretary of state, the man Reagan had personally pledged would be his leading official in foreign policy-making. This example also shows the extent to which the president was able to bypass normal bureaucratic procedures. He had planned the exercise with Clark, Casey and Kirkpatrick and not one of his advisors had suggested that they should involve Shultz.

To some degree the behaviour of his advisors is understandable if they felt that Shultz would disagree with their idea and argue his case to the president. But it highlights two important breakdowns in the foreign policy-making process. First, Bill Clark as national security advisor was tasked with making sure the president had access to all views in relation to policy options. By deliberately keeping Schultz out of the process he was pursuing an overtly



ideological agenda to shape policy, which went against the purview of the role of the NSA. Second, and more crucial, was the fact that Reagan had not asked why Shultz was absent. The president should have actively sought the engagement of his secretary of state and should have been aware that he was restricting himself to working with a group of advisors who only represented the more aggressively anti-Sandinista element of his administration. What is more, by cutting Shultz out of the process, Reagan was signalling to Clark, whether intentionally or not, that he agreed that his national security advisor should take a greater role in leading US policy in Nicaragua, thus strengthening the hand of the NSC in their bureaucratic tussle with the State Department.

If Reagan had spoken to Shultz, however, it is possible that not only would he have voiced his concerns over the foreign policy implications of sending the military to Honduras, but also he would have been able to brief the president on the domestic political ramifications of such a decision. Congress was planning to schedule a critical vote on Contra funding for the end of July and Shultz would have been able to tell the president that war games off the coast of Nicaragua would heighten the sense of alarm felt by the general public, which in turn would result in increased congressional opposition to the president's Contra policy. This inevitably happened. On 28 July the House voted 228 to 195 to suspend all aid to the Contras.<sup>72</sup> However, the administration knew the Republican-controlled Senate would not agree fully to this. To influence the Senate, an NSC meeting was held on 16 September to produce a new Nicaragua intelligence finding.<sup>73</sup> This was duly submitted to the congressional intelligence committees and stated that US policy was now:

to induce the Sandinistas and Cubans and their allies to cease their support for insurgents in the region; to hamper Cuban/Nicaraguan arms trafficking; to divert Nicaragua's resources and energies from support to Central American guerrilla movements; and to bring the Sandinistas in to meaningful negotiations and constructive, verifiable agreement with their neighbours on peace in the region.<sup>74</sup>

The document was a clear intent to signal that the purpose of the covert operations was limited to halting Nicaraguan subversion in the region. However, the final paragraphs of the finding are telling. They state that US support of paramilitaries will stop once the arms trafficking and subversion ceases, and when 'the government of Nicaragua is demonstrating a commitment to provide amnesty and non-discriminatory participation in the Nicaraguan political process by all Nicaraguans'.<sup>75</sup> This is one of the first officially documented statements that Reagan's policy was not only directed at the outward conduct of the Sandinista regime but that he was also aiming for internal democratic reform, and the Contras were to be used as a tool in achieving this end. This change in policy seems to have been missed by the House committee, and in the reconciliation process with the Republican

Senate, the outright ban on Contra funding was eventually capped at \$24 million. One major limitation was that the bill prohibited the use of CIA contingency funds, which meant that Reagan would have to apply to Congress to authorise future funds.<sup>76</sup>

This was the first successful attempt by Congress to place restrictions on the executive. However, the law was based on the assertion that the purpose of the Contras was to drive the Sandinistas to the negotiating table. As discussed above, both Reagan and the hardliners did not believe it was possible to negotiate with communists and that any attempts at diplomacy would only lead to accommodation or strategic time-wasting on behalf of the Sandinistas. Indeed, Reagan publicly announced in November that he had no faith in the Sandinistas as negotiating partners stating: 'I haven't believed anything they've been saying since they got in charge'.<sup>77</sup> This was Reagan signalling to Congress that he intended to continue funding the Contras, but it also publicly undercut the position of George Shultz and any future attempts he would try to make at pursuing a negotiated diplomatic solution.

### **Reagan's weakness**

At this point it is necessary to isolate and analyse the role of President Reagan in the policy-making process during this period. Reagan was clearly involved in setting the agenda at both the rhetorical and policy levels. Reagan had articulated publicly, within his administration and even in his own personal diary that he viewed the Sandinista government as one of the most serious security threats facing the US. He was adamant that first and foremost the trafficking of arms from Nicaragua to other countries in the region had to be stopped. Both his administration and Congress were clear that this was at least one of his intentions. One of the major problems facing Reagan was that his administration was split between those who favoured a tougher, direct paramilitary response and those who wished to place more emphasis on the possibility for diplomacy and a negotiated settlement. By choosing to covertly support the Contras and publicly stating that he had little faith in the Sandinistas as bargaining partners, it seems clear that Reagan was closer to the hardliners on this issue than he was to the moderates. The major criticism of Reagan at this juncture is that he failed to explain this clearly to his staff. This was because having outlined his policy goal and having chosen covert paramilitary operations as the means by which he wished to achieve this goal, he once again assumed a hands-off approach to policy-making and did not immerse himself in the finer details of what exactly this policy would entail. By standing back, Reagan left what can be described as a power vacuum, where the bureaucratic factions within his administration began a turf fight over how best to implement his policy.

The example of the decision to launch Big Pine without the involvement of the secretary of state demonstrates that at this stage the national security advisor and the hardline elements within the National Security Council had

stepped into the vacuum and were beginning to dominate Central American policy-making. Although it is difficult to determine whether this was the end result that Reagan desired, it is clear that this situation was a direct result of Reagan's management style. The hardliners had listened to Reagan explain how serious he rated the situation in Nicaragua, and they were attempting to implement what they believed was his chosen policy. Clark, Casey and Kirkpatrick were happy to cut Shultz out of the process because they feared that he would bring his moderate views to the president's attention and would perhaps weaken Reagan's stance on the effectiveness of negotiations.

By delegating authority to the NSC, though, Reagan put himself and his administration at a distinct political disadvantage. The decision to launch Big Pine was made without enough consideration being taken of the domestic political situation, and to authorise controversial military manoeuvres so close to a crucial congressional vote on what was allegedly one of the president's top foreign policy issues was a mistake of the highest order. There is also the issue of how much Reagan was deliberately delegating as part of a conscious strategy as opposed to merely stepping back and allowing others to run the policy on his behalf. If it was a deliberate decision, then Reagan should have explained to his staff in detail why he was relying on the NSC and their staff to have such an expanded role in Nicaragua policy, why he was happy to allow Clark to step to the forefront of the decision-making process, and crucially, explained to Shultz why he was not involving him in some aspects of Nicaragua policy. Instead, it appears that Reagan was either unaware of what he was doing or not able to anticipate the bureaucratic and congressional fallout from his actions.

Reagan's lack of involvement is also highlighted in the bureaucratic struggle to replace William Clark, who had been forced to resign as a result of the Big Pine fiasco. Once again ideological divisions in the administration came to light as the moderates led by Shultz and Michael Deaver wanted James Baker to become the new national security advisor. The hardliners, led by Casey and Weinberger, wanted Jeane Kirkpatrick. As neither of the factions was prepared to back down and Reagan was unable, or unwilling, to settle the dispute, a compromise was eventually reached and Robert McFarlane, Clark's deputy, was elevated to national security advisor.<sup>78</sup> As we shall see in the forthcoming discussion of Iran-Contra, this compromise would play a crucial role in the difficulties in which the administration found itself as a result of Reagan's inability to exert a tight control over his NSC staff.

### **Mining the harbours**

Congress may have placed restrictions on the president's attempts to fund the Contras, but Reagan intensified his efforts in two ways. The belief amongst the hardliners was that the contras were 'the only significant pressure being applied against the regime in Managua'.<sup>79</sup> He allowed the CIA to increase the size of the Contra force to 18,000 and did so without informing the

congressional oversight committees.<sup>80</sup> The CIA was also given authorisation to conduct its own attacks. Peter Kornbluh has estimated that the CIA conducted 22 assaults on various Nicaraguan targets.<sup>81</sup> Having previously denied authorisation to increase the size and strength of the Contras, the decision to finally do this and allow the CIA a more direct and aggressive role in Nicaragua demonstrates the extent to which the hardliners in the NSC had begun to take ever greater control of Nicaragua policy.

Whilst Reagan was expanding the role of the CIA and the size of the Contra force, he also began articulating a new goal for these groups and a possible change in the direction of US policy towards Nicaragua. Until this point the president had publicly declared that the purpose of US intervention in Nicaragua was to put a stop to arms trafficking and to halt the spread of revolutionary communism in the Western Hemisphere. This was a policy directed purely at the external behaviour of the Sandinistas. However, as discussed previously, the intelligence finding of September 1983 stated that the US was also seeking to improve the levels of participation in Nicaraguan politics. This hinted that Reagan was pursuing more than just arms interdiction. However, this aspect of US policy had remained relatively secret, although questions had been raised by the congressional committees when originally briefed by Bill Casey, in relation to both the alleged ends of US policy and the means employed to achieve them. By March of 1984, Reagan appeared to be finally admitting that his policy in Nicaragua was not just restricted to trying to modify the external behaviour of the Sandinistas. Speaking to reporters, Reagan publicly announced, 'We've made it plain to Nicaragua – made it very plain that this [the war] will stop when they keep their promise and restore a democratic rule and have elections'.<sup>82</sup> Now the president was not willing to merely focus on external subversion, he wanted to see actual democratic reform in Nicaragua, and the Contras would be his method of choice to try and achieve this aim. Unsurprisingly, this newly articulated policy raised many important questions in relation to the capability of the Contras to force change in Nicaragua, whether the Contras could realistically claim to be fighting for democracy, and from liberal Democrats who strongly rejected the idea that the US should engage in the overthrow of foreign governments.

The most controversial incident took place in the first months of 1984. Reagan authorised the mining of Nicaraguan harbours. Not only was the decision controversial, but the procedure used to decide on this course of action was also troubling. The original idea to plant mines off the coast of Nicaragua originated in the Restricted Inter-Agency Group (RIG) responsible for Central America. This group consisted of lower level officials including Langhorne Motley, the assistant Secretary of State for Latin America and Oliver North, a Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel serving on the NSC staff. This group 'explored the idea, won the agreement of the RIG, obtained Reagan's approval, organized the operation, and then in their own fashion briefed the congressional oversight committees'.<sup>83</sup> In a memo to

Robert McFarlane, Oliver North and Constantine Menges explain how the operation was carried out: 'Our intention is to severely disrupt the flow of shipping essential to Nicaraguan trade during the peak export period ... to impair the already critical fuel capacity in Nicaragua ... thus hampering their ability to support ... guerrillas in El Salvador'. They go on to state: 'once a ship has been sunk no insurers will cover ships calling in Nicaraguan ports', thus forcing the Sandinistas to rely on Cuban and Soviet supplies. In accordance with prior arrangements, the Contras were to take responsibility for the operation.<sup>84</sup> This document demonstrates that the CIA were not solely responsible for the operation and that the NSC staff were heavily involved in the policy's formulation and implementation.

There were several problems with the plan. The bureaucratic process involved highlights many of the flaws of Reagan's management system. The first is that, once again, only a few members of the administration were involved. These officials were also hardliners, with military backgrounds, who had total faith in the effectiveness of covert operations. However, by utilising only a small group with an almost homogenous view of the situation, there was a lack of detailed review of the plan. Possible shortcomings and negatives were not properly assessed. It had not been subjected to detailed criticism, for example, by the military experienced joint chiefs-of-staff.<sup>85</sup> The NSC staff was supposed to analyse the potential costs involved in choosing a particular policy; however, Oliver North, the NSC staff member involved in this policy, was not a 'disinterested party', but in fact a 'zealous advocate'.<sup>86</sup> Thus, when the proposal was presented to Reagan, he was not privy to all the information he required to make a decision. Not only does this highlight the problem of Reagan's foreign policy-making structure, it also demonstrates the problem of Reagan's personal management style. When presented with the proposal he did not ask for a detailed review, he did not probe the CIA estimates and he did not think to ask the joint-chiefs for their expert military opinion. Much like Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs, Reagan had authorised an incursion into Central America on the basis of weak intelligence and poor planning.

The second major problem was that the plan had been conceived and executed without briefing Congress, as was required by law. This might not have been a problem for Reagan if the operation had remained covert, but news of the CIA's involvement broke at the beginning of April.<sup>87</sup> Congress' reaction was not surprising. On 9 April, Barry Goldwater, the senate intelligence committee chairman, and previously a supporter of Reagan's Nicaragua policy, wrote an angry letter to CIA Director Casey stating:

It gets down to one, little, simple phrase: I am pissed off! ... The President has asked us to back his foreign policy. Bill, how can we back his foreign policy when we don't know what the hell he is doing? ... But mine the harbours of Nicaragua? This is an act violating international law. It is an act of war. For the life of me, I don't see how we are going to explain it.<sup>88</sup>

For majorities in both the House and the Senate, there was no acceptable way to explain the president's decision. Resolutions were quickly passed condemning the operation. On 25 May, the House voted to ban all funds for use in military or covert activities against Nicaragua and the Senate accepted the ban. This became known as the Second Boland Amendment (Boland II) and was attached to a Continuing Appropriations Resolution in October, which the president signed into law. According to Boland, this law 'ended US support for the war in Nicaragua'.<sup>89</sup> However, the ban on funding was attached to a continuing resolution that would have to be voted on again in a year's time. As the issue of Contra funding was so important to President Reagan, it was inevitable that he would continue his attempts to win increased funding for the Contras and would once again force a vote on the issue in the coming year. The ban had certainly not ended support for the war in Nicaragua. Instead, it had merely delayed possible congressional support for the Contras. Reagan and the executive would continue with the funds they had, and as shall be shown, engaged in controversial activities to find alternative sources of funding.

### **The search for alternative sources of funding**

The search for alternative sources of Contra funding began as early as January 1984. President Reagan had learned from the experience of the first Boland amendment that there was every chance he would be unable to secure a reliable source of US funds for the Contras. If there was going to be a heated and prolonged struggle between Congress and the president every time the subject of Contra funding was discussed, then Reagan realised there would be every chance that funding to the Contras could be cut-off for periods of time. As the US was the major source of funding for the Contras and provided it with the experienced military and CIA personnel required to conduct successful operations, it was essential for Reagan to seek out additional sources who would be able to contribute to the Contra efforts to secure an adequate level of funds should Congress try to restrict the president's use of US funds.

The topic was first discussed at a meeting of the National Security Planning Group on 6 January 1984. A decision was taken to begin 'immediate efforts to obtain additional funding of \$10–15 million from foreign or domestic sources to make up for the fact that the current \$24 million appropriation [for the contras] will sustain operations only through June 1984'.<sup>90</sup> Responsibility for this operation was given to National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane along with the assistance of NSC staff members Oliver North and Constantine Menges. McFarlane has testified that Reagan gave him the instruction to keep the Contras alive 'body and soul'.<sup>91</sup> The intention being that it was now the responsibility of the NSC staff to maintain the Contras as an effective fighting force, even in the face of congressional restrictions.

This instruction is important for two reasons. The first is that it demonstrates the extent to which the NSC and its staff had become central to the operation of US foreign policy. Instead of acting as an impartial coordinator of information to help the president make decisions, the national security advisor and his staff were to begin active involvement in the operational side of foreign policy implementation. What once would have been left to diplomatic, intelligence or military personnel, was now to be conducted by the NSC. Second, Reagan's order to keep the Contras alive and to involve the NSC in the search for donors highlights the extent to which he did not accept congressional limits on his conduct as chief executive. He had determined that the Sandinistas posed a severe security threat to the US, had decided that the Contras were the only available option to maintain the required amount of pressure on the Sandinistas and, as president, was not prepared to sacrifice the Contras on the demands of a thin majority in Congress.

The first attempt to find external funding for the Contras was conducted in March 1984. Bill Casey had suggested to McFarlane that he should approach Israel and begin negotiations over the possibility of them supplying weapons and funding to the Contras. In April, McFarlane dispatched an NSC staff member, Howard Teicher, to ask the Israeli government if they would be willing to provide supplies to the Contra operation. The Israelis declined. From the outset, McFarlane decided to keep his programme a secret. He was worried that it would be 'annoying and upsetting to the Congress' and 'embarrassing to Israel', although he was convinced the approach was 'perfectly legal'.<sup>92</sup> This assertion, however, is somewhat contradicted by McFarlane's behaviour in relation to other members of the administration. Shultz was informed about the approach to Israel from the US embassy in Israel. When he confronted McFarlane, he was told that Teicher had gone to Israel 'on his own hook'.<sup>93</sup> This indicates that McFarlane was not merely keeping the policy a secret from Congress, but that he was actively involved in trying to keep both his role and details of the policy as quiet as possible within the administration.

After the Israeli setback, McFarlane continued to look for other countries who would be willing to provide material support to the Contras. In May he met with Prince Bandar, the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the US. Over the course of their meeting McFarlane explained to the ambassador that Nicaragua was one of Reagan's most serious foreign policy concerns and he was especially worried about how the situation would deteriorate if the Congress cut off funding. According to McFarlane, 'it became pretty obvious to the Ambassador that his country, to gain a considerable amount of favour and, frankly, they thought it was the right thing to do, they would provide the support when the Congress cut it off'.<sup>94</sup> The ambassador contacted McFarlane a few days later and confirmed that the Saudi Arabian government would be willing to contribute \$1 million a month, which would be deposited in a bank account opened by Oliver North, who was now running the ground operation in Nicaragua. McFarlane then reported this news to President

Reagan and Vice-President Bush. He also informed Shultz and Weinberger that funding for the Contras had been arranged until the end of the year, but he did not tell them the source of the funding and they did not ask him.<sup>95</sup> When the Saudis made their first payment in early June, McFarlane told the president that 'no one else knows about this' and the president responded, 'Good, let's just make sure it stays that way'.<sup>96</sup>

Third country funding of the Contras was discussed at the 25 June meeting of the National Security Planning Group, which was attended by the majority of Reagan's senior foreign policy advisors. The minutes of this meeting are an important document as they are one of only two sets of post-1981NSC/NSPG minutes on the topic of Nicaragua that have been declassified. As a result they give us a valuable insight into the thinking and planning of Reagan and his closest advisors. The topic of third country funding proved to be a matter of some controversy. CIA Director Bill Casey stated, 'The legal position is that the CIA is authorised to cooperate and seek support from third countries' claiming that 'If we notify the oversight committees, we can help the FDN [Contras] get the money they need from third countries'.<sup>97</sup> However, Shultz claimed that he had spoken to James Baker, a lawyer and Reagan's chief-of-staff, who told him 'if we go out and try to get money from third countries it is an impeachable offence'.<sup>98</sup> A technical discussion then took place between Casey, Shultz and Weinberger over the specifics of Baker's judgement and the actual policy being pursued. Casey claimed that Baker had said everything would be legal so long as the oversight committees were informed, Shultz retorted that 'the US government may raise and spend funds only through an appropriation of the Congress',<sup>99</sup> while Weinberger tried to argue that it would not in fact be the US government who was spending the money as 'it is merely helping the anti-Sandinistas obtain the money from other sources'.<sup>100</sup> The discussion of Contra funding was brought to a conclusion by Shultz who suggested, 'we need to get an opinion from the Attorney General on whether we can help the Contras obtain money from third countries. It would be the prudent thing to do'.<sup>101</sup>

It is rather striking that it was Shultz, the most prominent moderate in the administration, who should voice the idea that it would be best to consult with the president's lawyer, the attorney general, to determine the legality of pursuing third country donations to the Contras. Unfortunately for Shultz, and most of the advisors present at the meeting, neither Reagan nor McFarlane mentioned the fact that they had already secured funding from Saudi Arabia. The question of whether such funding was legal or not is an interesting topic, and has been pursued at depth in the literature,<sup>102</sup> but it is not the one being addressed here. Instead, the minutes of the 25 June meeting demonstrate the extent to which Reagan was involved in the breakdown of his foreign policy-making process. Not for the first time, Reagan had formulated and executed a highly controversial policy without consulting all of his senior advisors. In the first instance, ordering the Big Pine military operation, he did not consult with Secretary of State Shultz, but had at least discussed the issue



with Secretary of Defense Weinberger. The decision to pursue third country donors was reached in a much more restricted manner. The task was given to Robert McFarlane and the NSC staff, with the support of Bill Casey. The standard operating procedures of Reagan's administration, the inter-agency process, was completely bypassed. All of Reagan's key foreign policy and legal advisors had been cut out of the process. None of them were given the chance to review the options and advise the president. When the topic of third country donors was finally discussed at a formal meeting of the NSPG, Reagan decided not to inform his staff that he was already pursuing the policy under discussion.

For whatever reason, possibly believing the need for secrecy was great, Reagan consciously chose this course of action. Having been elected on a promise to implement cabinet government, by the end of his first term Reagan had centralised foreign policy-making within the White House, had cut most of his advisors out of a controversial aspect of Nicaragua policy, and had authorised the NSC staff to expand into the operational side of intelligence gathering and covert activities. Reagan had put in motion the sequence of events that would eventually lead to the Iran-Contra affair, the largest political scandal in the US since Watergate and the end of the Nixon administration.

### *Diplomacy*

The minutes of the 25 June NSPG meeting are also important because they highlight the divide between the hardliners and the moderates on the issue of diplomacy and the stance the US should take in relation to Nicaragua. Multilateral negotiations had been taking place since 1983 within what became known as the Contadora group. Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela were attempting to deal simultaneously with the conflicts in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, as well as addressing wider issues such as economic and political development. The motivation behind the initiative was that a regional settlement was required, in large part because the US was not attempting to engage in serious diplomatic negotiations to help solve the crises and was instead relying on military and covert intervention.<sup>103</sup> Initially, President Campins of Venezuela told the US that they 'don't want [Reagan] to back Contadora but also not to put any obstacles in the way. Because we know the problem was a Latin America problem and must be solved by ourselves'.<sup>104</sup> However, as the meeting of 25 June makes clear, the Contadora process was viewed at least as part of US strategy in the region.

Shultz informed the NSPG that his State Department were involved in 'bilateral conversations' with the Nicaraguans which had not yet been formalised but were scheduled to become a regular occurrence to run in addition to the Contadora negotiations. However, this strategy was vehemently opposed by Weinberger. He did not want to 'dignify' the Sandinistas with offering them bilateral meetings in Washington and argued that US policy

should be to help 'the Contadora countries, who are our friends, obtain a comprehensive and viable Contadora treaty'.<sup>105</sup> Reagan, however, was even more candid in his assessment of the diplomatic situation: 'If we are just talking about negotiations with Nicaragua, that is so far-fetched to imagine that a communist government like that would make any reasonable deal with us, but if it is to get Congress to support the anti-Sandinistas, then that can be helpful'.<sup>106</sup> Reagan had absolutely no faith in the idea that a bilateral negotiated settlement with the Sandinistas was possible. This demonstrates the important role played by Reagan's worldview. He continued to view the Nicaraguan situation as a Soviet-engineered communist ploy, and, as predicted by the worldview literature, did not accept information that contradicted the image he held. As a result he did not pursue bilateral negotiations in any serious manner and continued to support the Contras as his policy preference.

However, the president believed that the informal bilateral talks with the Nicaraguans should continue because they had 'already begun and the press is eager to paint us as having failed again', but these would only be an adjunct to the Contadora process, which Reagan hoped would be able to achieve a negotiated solution that would be acceptable to him.<sup>107</sup> However, Reagan was also clear that the only way this would happen would be with the continued use and support of the Contras: 'The Contra funding... is what will keep the pressure on Nicaragua, and the only way we are going to get a good Contadora treaty is if we keep the pressure on'.<sup>108</sup> Peter Rodman has referred to this as Reagan's 'Delphic pronouncement'.<sup>109</sup> This was a clear statement that the priority for the US was the continuation of the Contra programme and that there would be no serious direct negotiations with the Sandinistas. The purpose of the negotiations was purely to appease the liberal members of Congress and hope that they would be encouraged by the appearance of diplomacy to vote in favour of increased Contra funding. This is an example of Reagan setting the direction of US foreign policy. It also demonstrates the extent to which the president was refusing to give in to the congressional restrictions on his Nicaragua policy. The Contras would remain the central focus of his policy and he would continue to press Congress to fund them. The evidence above demonstrates a clear role for presidential agency in US foreign policy. It was Reagan who insisted on prioritising Nicaragua and it was Reagan who overruled the moderates to continue US support for the Contras as the primary policy option.

### ***Temporary presidential success with Congress***

It is ironic, therefore, that just as Reagan had authorised the search for alternate sources of funding, in the years 1985 and 1986 the president was actually successful in his attempts to win funding from Congress, first by securing limited 'humanitarian' aid for the Contras in 1985, followed by victory in a 1986 vote which resulted in \$100 million dollars of military and humanitarian

aid being sent to the Contras. The president was able to achieve this on the back of three events, his sweeping victory in the 1984 presidential election, the enunciation of the Reagan Doctrine, which switched the terms of debate from the external behaviour of the Sandinistas to the internal characteristics of the Nicaraguan state, and the aggressive legislative strategy which placed the president at the front of a very public battle with Congress over the direction of Nicaragua policy.<sup>110</sup>

Reagan's position in relation to Congress was strengthened on the back of his electoral landslide, which saw him winning 49 states and over 58% of the popular vote. This made him the first second term president since Nixon, and the most popular since Eisenhower. Not surprisingly, Reagan viewed this as an electoral mandate and was determined to use this to his advantage in pursuing his Nicaragua policy. According to Robert McFarlane, Reagan explained that he did not want to 'break faith with the Contras' and ordered his national security advisor to 'to do everything possible to reverse the course of the Congress and get the funding renewed'.<sup>111</sup> McFarlane agreed with Reagan, up to a point. He believed that the Contras would be useful only if they were supported by Congress and funded accordingly as 'without this support the contras were a hopelessly weak reed on which to rest American policy'.<sup>112</sup> The president was adamant, however, that the Contras would continue to be the focal point of his strategy, with or without the backing of Congress.

With the president making it clear that he wished to continue his struggle with Congress over Contra funding, the administration began trying to shift the terms of the Nicaraguan debate. Until this point the president had continually emphasised the security threat that the communist Sandinista regime posed to the US because of what Reagan viewed as a concerted attempt to spread communist revolution throughout Central America, and the overriding fear that this would allow the Soviet Union a foothold on the continent of North America. As discussed previously, such an outcome was unacceptable for Reagan. However, it had proven almost impossible to win over a majority of Congress and the wider population to accept such an assessment. Reagan, therefore, decided that he would have to change tactics to win over the liberal members of Congress. Instead of focusing on the external behaviour of the Sandinistas, Reagan began to question the legitimacy of the Sandinista regime.<sup>113</sup>

The most notable example of this shift came during Reagan's state of the union address on 6 February, where he explained that US security depended on 'the expansion of freedom and self-government'. In particular, Reagan called on Congress to support the 'democratic forces [in Nicaragua] whose struggle is tied to our own security'.<sup>114</sup> This was a deliberate attempt by Reagan to tap into the legacy of democracy promotion in US foreign policy in the hope that aligning himself in this regard with liberal presidents such as Wilson and Kennedy would encourage the support of contemporary liberals in Congress. However, what separated Reagan from Wilson was his belief that

democracy in Nicaragua could be achieved through the use of the Contras as a military force, rather than Wilsonian diplomacy. A few weeks later at a press conference, Reagan was asked if the goal of US policy was to remove the Sandinistas from power. Reagan replied, 'Well, remove in the sense of its present structure, in which it is a Communist totalitarian state, and it is not a government chosen by the people. So, you wonder sometimes about those who make such claims as to its legitimacy', before adding 'we have an obligation to be of help where we can to freedom fighters and lovers of freedom and democracy, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua and wherever there are people of that kind who are striving for that freedom'. Asked if this required the overthrow of the Sandinistas, Reagan responded 'Not if the present government would turn around and say, all right, if they'd say: "Uncle"'.<sup>115</sup> The non-governmental organisation Human Rights Watch was quick to point out the hypocrisy of referring to the Contras as democratic freedom fighters when they were allegedly engaged in the 'deliberate use of terror'<sup>116</sup> to achieve the overthrow of the Sandinistas.<sup>117</sup>

With his post-election popularity and newly conceptualised Nicaragua policy, Reagan began the arduous task of attempting to win over a majority in Congress to support him. His administration began by making Congress and the public targets of what has been described by the General Accounting Office as 'prohibited, covert propaganda'.<sup>118</sup> Between the end of February and the end of April the administration had produced over 70 publications and held conferences, briefings and meetings with editorial boards in an attempt to shift attention away from the Contras democratic credentials by trying to paint Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union as the greatest threat to democracy in Central America.<sup>119</sup> The president put himself at the forefront of this campaign and increased the level of anti-communist rhetoric directed at congressmen who continued to oppose him on Nicaragua. Speaking to reporters on 4 April, Reagan noted:

Democracy can succeed in Central America. But Congress must release the funds that can create incentives for dialogue and peace. If we provide too little help, our choice will be a Communist Central America with Communist subversion spreading southward and northward. We face the risk that a hundred million people, from Panama to our open southern border, could come under the control of pro-Soviet regimes and threaten the United States with violence, economic chaos, and a human tidal wave of refugees.<sup>120</sup>

Whilst attempting to scare the population, Reagan appeared to weaken his demands to Congress. In the same speech, Reagan told Congress that if they released the \$14 million already appropriated, then he would not use this money for military purposes but to provide humanitarian assistance to the Contras, who in return would call a ceasefire and enter negotiations with the Sandinistas. It is unlikely that this was a genuine attempt to limit the US

to providing food and clothing to the Contras. Instead, safe in the knowledge that the Saudi Arabian government had been providing a million dollars a month for the past year, Reagan was probably attempting to move Congress in small steps towards greater support for the Contras.

The first round of congressional votes on the issue ended in failure, with the House voting down the \$14 million of humanitarian aid by 213 to 215. However, having moved from a complete funding cut-off to only two votes away from \$14 million in less than a year, demonstrates the extent to which Reagan was beginning to win over more members of Congress with his anti-communist rhetoric and aggressive legislative strategy.

Reagan was given a helping hand by the actions of the Sandinistas. On 23 April they announced that their president, Daniel Ortega, had arranged to visit General Secretary Gorbachev in Moscow at the beginning of May. This announcement proved to be a disaster for both the Sandinistas and the liberal Democrats who had voted against Reagan's humanitarian aid bill. Reagan was able to present this as clear evidence that the Sandinistas were intent on strengthening their ties with the Soviet Union. Senator Dodd claimed to be shocked 'that some Democrats were surprised that Daniel Ortega went to Moscow. Where did my colleagues think he was going to go? Disney World?'.<sup>121</sup> The actions of the Sandinistas allowed Reagan to impose a trade embargo on Nicaragua, allowing him to highlight the problems posed by communists in the region, and weakening the liberal Democrats still further.

As a result, the Democrats approached Reagan with a compromise. Representative McCurdy told the president that if he would commit to 'political, not military solutions in Central America' and give his assurance that 'we do not seek the military overthrow of the Sandinista government', then he would get the votes he needed.<sup>122</sup> McCurdy put this in a letter to be sent to congressmen and Reagan agreed to sign it. On 12 June the House approved \$27 million humanitarian aid for the Contras by a vote of 248 to 184. As Kagan has argued, 'Of the 73 Democrats who voted for the McCurdy amendment, no more than 25 were hardcore conservatives ... they voted more out of anger and fear than out of conviction, anger at Ortega and fear of the political consequences of voting against aid to the contras'.<sup>123</sup> Reagan had skilfully manipulated the political process and was finally beginning to push Congress closer to his desired goal of resuming the supply of US military aid to the Contras.

### ***1986 military aid***

By early 1986 Reagan was once again prepared to approach Congress and request military aid. The decision was finalised at a 10 January meeting of the NSC.<sup>124</sup> Several events had occurred since the passing of the humanitarian bill in June that helped firm up Reagan's position, including the discovery of Cuban soldiers in Nicaragua and the interception of Nicaraguan arms bound

for Honduras. On 26 February he requested \$100 million dollars from Congress, 70% in the form of military aid.<sup>125</sup> The president also requested the end of restrictions against the CIA and Department of Defense to allow them to operate the supply chain.<sup>126</sup> Reagan made it clear to Congress that he fully intended to support the Contras in their armed struggle to overthrow the Sandinistas by stating, 'you can't fight attack helicopters piloted by Cubans with band-aids and mosquito nets'.<sup>127</sup> However, it would be impossible for Reagan to get the bill passed without the support of moderate and conservative Democrats. To win these votes, the Reagan administration launched what Carothers has described as 'the single largest congressional lobbying effort of the entire Reagan presidency'.<sup>128</sup> The initial results were not promising, with Reagan losing a first vote on 20 March by 222 to 210. Reagan promised to 'come back, again and again, until this battle is won'.<sup>129</sup>

The propaganda campaign continued unabated in the mass media. Full-page advertisements and open letters were taken out in newspapers claiming that if the Contras were defeated then the US would be swamped with 'refugees, spies, criminals and terrorists'.<sup>130</sup> Such unsubstantiated vitriol drew criticism even from Republican supporters of Reagan's Nicaragua policy. Senator David Durenberger stated that portraying 'every senator and congressman who votes against lethal aid as a stooge of communism' was 'outrageous'.<sup>131</sup> However, this was a deliberate ploy by Reagan. Raising the spectre of increased immigration from Central America would lead to increased fear among residents of southern states, which in turn would lead to political difficulties for Democrats in these regions if they were accused of being soft on immigration. With the Congress so evenly split, Reagan was hoping this tactic would change the vote of enough southern moderate Democrats, and reinforce his traditional conservative base.

As with the humanitarian aid bill a year earlier, the Sandinistas contributed inadvertently to the Reagan legislative campaign. Only two days after Reagan's defeat in the House, the Nicaraguans launched an attack on Contra camps in Honduras. Having just voted against sending military aid to the Contras, many Democrats were left publicly embarrassed by the Sandinistas' incursion into a neighbouring country, and were once again left with the awkward choice of having either to defend their position to conservatives in their districts or acknowledging that Reagan had been correct and they would now support him.<sup>132</sup>

The combination of aggressive rhetoric, intense media campaigning and external events set the scene for a tense June vote on military aid. With only a 12-vote deficit Reagan personally intervened in the process. Reagan asked his staff to identify potential swing voters and invite them for a meeting with the president in the Oval Office. Combining his own personal charm, his popularity with the electorate and the prestige of the office of the presidency, Reagan was able to convince several congressmen to change their votes. Carroll Hubbard, one of two Kentucky Democrats who Reagan talked into voting in favour, has said:

It was a real thrill to meet with him ... I was leaning toward changing my position prior to meeting with the President, but I must admit his taking about 15 minutes of his time ... was persuasive upon me to help him out, to go along with him and trust his judgement ... I've always liked and admired him. I'm a Democrat, he's a Republican, but he's also my president.<sup>133</sup>

On June 25 the House voted 221–209 in favour of sending \$100 million to the Contras, 75% military aid, whilst the CIA and Department of Defense were authorised to train and provide intelligence to the guerrillas. Reagan finally achieved the result he had wanted. The task had not been easy and had required over two years of intense legislative effort and public relations endeavours. Reagan had initiated the campaign and had refused to back down in the face of congressional opposition. Representative Michael Barnes explains how influential Reagan was in the process: 'The guys in the middle just got tired of being beaten up on both sides ... they knew Reagan was going to come back and back and back on this. He was obsessed by it ... He just wore everybody out'.<sup>134</sup>

The victory also stands as testament to the ability of a president, especially a popular president, to shape the direction of US foreign policy and influence Congress. As Cynthia Arnson has argued, 'when a president as popular as Ronald Reagan made an issue his primary foreign policy goal, it was just a matter of time until he got what he wanted'.<sup>135</sup> This demonstrates how important presidential perseverance can be in determining bureaucratic and legislative success. From the beginning Reagan had made the Contras the focal point of his Nicaragua policy. Congressional funding would be key to this policy's success. Over the course of five years Reagan had been able to adapt his official public strategy towards Congress. He knew when to downplay military funding and emphasise humanitarian aid, or when to appeal directly to voters to increase their fears over the spread of communism in Central America. Even after setbacks when Congress voted against him he began again, asking for small amounts. The final goal was always military funding for the Contras, and in June 1986 Reagan achieved this. He was successful because, as stated above, he 'wore everybody out'. Moderate Republicans and liberal Democrats decided the time and effort it would take to fight Reagan would be better spent on other policies. They did not rank Nicaragua as high as Reagan and were not prepared to put the effort in to oppose his funding policy. This provides evidence to support the argument presented by this study that presidential agency is crucial to US foreign policy-making. Unfortunately for Reagan, the consequences of his decision to search for alternative sources of funding meant this success would be short-lived.

### **Reagan's management system: collapse**

If Reagan is to be credited with a central role in successfully acquiring military aid from Congress, he must also be credited for his part played in the nadir of

his presidency and the events that eventually put an end to any future attempts to fund the Contras. The Iran–Contra scandal was a hugely complex affair which involved both US policy in the Middle East and Central America. As a result, it would go far beyond the scope of this chapter to attempt to recount it in any great detail. Instead, several examples will be drawn from this incident to highlight the extent to which Reagan was responsible for the overall framing of the policy, if not the final and illegal decision that brought an end to his Nicaragua policy.

### *Iran-Contra and the end of Nicaragua policy*

In brief, the Iran-Contra scandal developed from Reagan's desire to secure alternate sources of funding for the Contras. As discussed previously, in 1984 he authorised his National Security Advisor, Robert McFarlane, to begin looking for possible donor countries, which eventually led to the involvement of the Saudi Arabian government. The operation was carried out by a restricted number of NSC officials, including McFarlane, Oliver North and Constantine Menges, who extended their role from merely sourcing funds to becoming actively engaged in running the supply operation in Nicaragua.<sup>136</sup> North and Menges were the point men for the operation on the ground, regularly meeting with Contra leaders.<sup>137</sup> At the same time, Reagan and his administration were involved with ongoing negotiations to attempt to free American hostages who had been captured in Lebanon. A complex plan was devised amongst a restricted number of NSC staff and Reagan to sell weapons to Iran, who in return, it was hoped, would use their political leverage with the hostage takers in Lebanon to gain the release of the American hostages.<sup>138</sup> Finally, and most controversially of all, McFarlane's successor as National Security Advisor, John Poindexter, authorised Oliver North's plan to transfer excess funds from the sale of missiles to Iran to the Contras in Nicaragua. The operation was exposed in November 1986 when a plane carrying CIA operatives crashed in Nicaragua and the Lebanese magazine *Ash-Shiraa* reported the sale of missiles to Iran. The scandal resulted in a congressional investigation, an independent counsel report, and criminal proceedings against several members of the NSC staff.

What is important for this analysis, however, is to locate the role of President Reagan. It was clear to his staff, the Congress and the public that he deemed the situation in Nicaragua to be of utmost importance to US national security. He had also explicitly stated time and again that any US policy in this region must be centred on supporting the Contras militarily in order for them to put pressure on the Sandinistas, either to force them to the negotiating table or to overthrow them. Once the Boland amendment was passed he had given clear instructions to his NSC staff to keep the Contras supplied. This set in motion the chain of events detailed in the previous paragraph. Therefore Reagan was very much the chief instigator of the policy to search for outside funds. What is more, it was Reagan who decided to give this task



to the NSC staff and restrict access to information relating to the project even from some of his closest advisors, including the secretaries of defense and state. Thus his administration was divided and he was happy to delegate control of the policy to the selected members of his NSC staff. In this instance, delegation proved to be his Achilles heel. As Draper has argued, 'The president's notorious lack of interest in details gave them [the NSC staff] something in the nature of a blank cheque, once they had obtained his general agreement to a course of action'.<sup>139</sup> To make matters worse, there is general agreement amongst Reagan's staff that once he authorised the Contra funding operation, he stepped back and rarely followed up the progress of his staff. North and Menges were operating safe in the knowledge that they had presidential authority to carry out their tasks. Poindexter took the decision to transfer the funds to the Contras, and deliberately did not tell the president to provide him with plausible deniability should the operation be uncovered.

By delegating this authority to Poindexter, Reagan seriously undermined the foreign policy-making process of his administration. He had been elected on the promise to implement a cabinet form of government and to put an end to the bureaucratic conflicts between the NSA and the secretary of state. By 1986 Reagan had cut Shultz out of important elements of both his Central American and Middle Eastern policies, centralised foreign policy-making in the White House and pushed his NSAs into operational roles. However, in doing so, Reagan placed Poindexter in a position that he was not qualified for. Instead of helping coordinate presidential foreign policy by presenting Reagan with unbiased policy options from the relevant departments and agencies, Poindexter decided on his own not to tell the president about the possibility of transferring arms from Iran to the Contras, and instead authorised the transfer, believing that this was what the president would have wanted. One cannot blame Reagan for Poindexter taking this decision, but as president and fully aware that both the Iran missiles sale and Contra funding hunt were under way he should have been asking Poindexter for regular and detailed updates, especially as he was unable to discuss the matter with Shultz. Therefore, the decision to transfer the funds was an indirect consequence of the policy and the process Reagan had initiated.

The decision to conduct the operation through the NSC staff was not just about restricting access within the administration, it was a deliberate strategy by Reagan to bypass the congressional oversight committees. As discussed earlier, during his first term Reagan had been scrutinised by the congressional oversight committees after he authorised the original covert interventions in late 1981. However, by giving the operation to the NSC staff, this cut out Congress as only the CIA were required to brief the intelligence committees once a covert finding had been signed by the president.<sup>140</sup> As Judge Walsh noted in his report following the completion of his independent counsel investigation, Reagan and his selected members of the NSC staff 'came to accept ... the mistaken view that Congress couldn't be trusted and ... [policy] was better left to a small inside group not elected by the people ... a scheme

that reflected a total distrust in some constitutional values'.<sup>141</sup> Draper is even more scathing in his analysis:

The combination of compartmentation, deniability, and secrecy made it possible for a few of the self-elect to become, as Secretary Weinberger put it, 'people with their own agenda'. This phrase starkly expresses what was most significant about the Iran–contra affairs – the takeover of governmental policies by a few strategically placed insiders infatuated with their own sense of superiority and incorruptibility.<sup>142</sup>

Reagan had not only allowed this to happen, but had played a central role. He wanted to fund the Contras and he was prepared to do this with or without the authorisation of Congress. In his diary he had written 'I was tired of foreign policy by a committee of 535',<sup>143</sup> a reference to his desire to pursue foreign policy without the continued interference of Congress. Poindexter even went so far to testify before the congressional committee investigating the Iran–Contra affair that Reagan was 'ready to confront the Congress on the constitutional question of who controls foreign policy'.<sup>144</sup> However, the committee concluded that the Iran–Contra affair was characterised by 'secrecy, deception, and disdain for the law'.<sup>145</sup>

Reagan's defence was that he 'was not fully informed'.<sup>146</sup> However, this is a rather weak defence as the only aspect of the policy he had not been informed about was the diversion of funds. He had ordered the search for external funds, he knew about the Saudi money, he knew about the sale of weapons to Iran and he knew about North and Menges running the supply operations with the Contras. He had also involved himself directly at crucial junctions, for example when he telephoned the president of Honduras and asked him not to shut down the Contra bases in his country.<sup>147</sup> Whether Reagan broke the law is not important for the current analysis, what has been demonstrated is that Reagan was very much a central force in the making of the Iran–Contra policy. Reagan was not a puppet at the hands of competing groups of advisors. He knew what his goals were and he acted accordingly to achieve them. Unfortunately, his weaknesses were an over-reliance on the delegation of authority to the wrong people and a complete inability to follow up on their endeavours. It was this combination of involvement at the planning stage and absence at the implementation that eventually brought an end to any hope Reagan had of engineering a Contra victory in Nicaragua. For his remaining two years in office he was unable to convince Congress to release any more funds to the Contras, and he left office in 1989 with the Sandinistas still in power.

## **Conclusion**

In the previous chapter it was argued that Reagan's worldview contributed to the formulation of the policy of rollback. This is the goal that motivated Reagan and provides us with the overriding framework that has allowed us to

analyse and explain his role in the formulation of policy in Nicaragua. When the Sandinistas came to power and began initiating their left-wing reforms, forging ties with Cuba and the Soviet Union, and exporting arms to help support other rebel movements in Central America, it would have been difficult for an ideologue like Reagan to view this as anything other than a direct security threat and ideological challenge to the US. The fact this was happening in Central America, so close to the US and in the middle of what Reagan viewed as the US's traditional sphere of influence, only helped intensify the feeling of threat felt by Reagan. It was almost inevitable therefore that the US under Reagan would rank Nicaragua as one of the highest foreign policy issues requiring attention. The evidence presented in this chapter supports the argument that Reagan's worldview was crucial to the decision to rank Nicaragua as a major security threat and played a key role in the framing of Nicaragua as a Soviet-controlled proxy.

The shape the US response eventually took was obviously a combination of several factors, both domestic and international. First of all there were important systemic restrictions facing Reagan. He viewed Nicaragua as a proxy of Cuba and the Soviet Union. Any hostile action taken by the US against Nicaragua could quickly escalate if the Soviet Union decided to respond. Thus Reagan was limited by his desire not to provoke a wider war with the Soviet Union. Second, there were domestic restrictions placed on Reagan by the American public. The legacy of Vietnam was still felt strongly and it would be impossible for Reagan to involve the US in any military conflict that did not have clear national security implications. Although Reagan felt that Nicaragua posed a serious threat to US security, for the duration of his presidency a majority of the US public disagreed with him. This was reflected in continued opposition to his Nicaragua policies from a significant proportion of Congress.

However, even with these restrictions, it is necessary to acknowledge the role played by Reagan in determining the direction of US policy in Nicaragua. He could not engage the US military in an overt intervention, but as president he could authorise the CIA, along with traditional military support, to engage in covert operations to help support the Contra rebel groups who were engaged in an armed rebellion against the Sandinista government. Reagan was also the driving force behind the policy of refusing to negotiate with the Sandinistas without the support of the Contras. With Reagan as president it was clear to all observers that supporting the Contras remained the focal point of his Nicaragua policy. Reagan believed that it would be impossible to achieve reform in Nicaragua without the threat posed by the Contras. Without the Contras, Reagan argued that the Sandinistas would only engage in diplomacy to buy time to strengthen their hold over Nicaragua. It is clear to see, therefore, that Reagan set the agenda of foreign policy during his administration. He chose the outcome he desired and set in motion the policy that he believed would help him achieve this goal.

The impact Reagan had on US foreign policy can also be seen from his relationship with his foreign policy executive. Reagan tried to surround himself with ideological cohorts, but on an issue as controversial as Nicaragua it was not surprising that divisions would open up between those who agreed with Reagan's hardline approach and those who favoured more moderate tactics. Complicating this division was the fact that most of the hardliners were to be found in the White House and NSC, whereas the moderates were mostly drawn from the State Department. To smooth over these differences and bring focus to US foreign policy would require extensive presidential involvement to help iron out these bureaucratic conflicts. Unfortunately this did not happen under Reagan. Time and again throughout this chapter it was demonstrated that Reagan not only failed to resolve these structural issues, he also contributed to them by cutting out various members of his staff from policy discussions. Shultz was absent from the decision to launch Big Pine and most of his foreign policy team was not told of Reagan's decision to search for alternate sources of funding for the Contras. The Iran-Contra scandal demonstrates the complexity of US foreign policy-making and the myriad of actors and forces at play, but it also allows us to draw conclusions about the impact the president has. Those involved in the scandal explained they acted in accordance with what they thought Reagan wanted. His desire to support the Contras was so clear that Poindexter, North, Menges *et al.* did not think they had to run every detail past Reagan because it was obvious he wanted the Contras to remain the focal point of Nicaragua policy. The fact that Reagan was happy to delegate such authority, and did not intervene to review the policy or demand regular updates, only demonstrates the extent to which a president, by his absence, leaves a power vacuum in the foreign policy bureaucracy. In the case of Nicaragua this vacuum was quickly filled by the NSC staff. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that Iran-Contra was a direct, although unintended, consequence of Reagan's policy choice and hands-off management style.

The case study of Reagan and Nicaragua also sheds light on the relationship between the president and Congress. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Founding Fathers designed the constitution to force the branches of government to share power so that each branch would act as a check on the other. In some respects, Reagan's Nicaragua policy demonstrates the extent to which this is true. Reagan was never able to convince a majority in Congress to consistently support him on the issue of aid to the Contras. There was a constant seesaw back and forth between votes in favour of Reagan's policy and votes against. At one point Congress was able to place restrictions on Reagan, even going so far as to cut off all aid to the Contras as a result of the second Boland Amendment. However, in spite of this opposition, Reagan was still able to conduct foreign policy in Nicaragua, was able to send US forces to intervene covertly, was able to secure outside funding for the Contras in direct opposition to the congressional ban, and was finally able to secure a vote in favour of military aid to the Contras after a monumental legislative

effort with Reagan at the forefront. It is interesting to think how successful Reagan might have eventually been in the last two years of his presidency if Iran–Contra had not happened, or had at least not broken in the media.

Reagan's Nicaragua policy directly challenges the post-Vietnam and Watergate era argument that the 'imperial' presidency had been replaced by a resurgent Congress, let alone an 'imperilled' presidency.<sup>148</sup> It suggests that Congress struggles to be anything more than a reactive branch in foreign policy. In the time it takes for the Congress to secure a majority in opposition to a president's policy, the executive may have already set in motion a policy that will be impossible to retract at short notice. When faced with a president as popular as Reagan, Congress finds itself in an even weaker position, with members of Congress reluctant to challenge the president lest they face accusations of being weak on national security. That is not to say that Congress has no power at all. A significant congressional majority opposed to the president's policy can make life very difficult for the chief executive. However, Congress lacks the unity and decisiveness of the presidency, so it is often slow to react. This is precisely the advantage that Reagan used to assert presidential dominance in foreign affairs. However, with Iran–Contra he went too far, and suffered the consequences.

In conclusion, Reagan offers a valuable insight into presidential agency in US foreign policy-making. Individual presidents may be restricted by international and domestic constraints, but within these boundaries it is clearly possible for a president to place a significant personal stamp on the conduct of US foreign policy. In the case of Nicaragua, the most important decisions: to intervene or not, to intervene covertly or overtly, to fund the Contras, to pursue alternate sources of funding, all of these decisions were made by Reagan and it is possible to imagine how a different policy would have emerged if another president had been elected.

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## 7 Comparison of Truman and Reagan

### Introduction

This chapter will conduct a comparison of the foreign policies of presidents Truman and Reagan to establish the impact the president has on the formulation of US foreign policy. The chapter will proceed in three sections looking at the sources and constraints of presidential autonomy. The first section begins with the external environment each president confronts in the shape of the international system. This section will argue that the president's worldview is crucial in determining the general orientation of US foreign policy during each administration. The second section focuses on the internal sources and constraints of the executive bureaucracy. Unsurprisingly, as chief executive, the president has greater control over events within this environment. However, more room for presidential manoeuvre results in opportunities for both success and failure. This section will argue that the management style adopted by the president becomes an important factor in all aspects of foreign policy, including decision-making and implementation. The third and final section places the president within the context of the US system of separated powers. It will look at how the constitutional settlement, which forces the president and Congress to share foreign policy power, creates a system of formal constraints with which each president must contend. The argument presented here is that how the president works with Congress is central to the success of their foreign policy.

Throughout the chapter it will be noted that each of these sources and constraints do not exist in isolation. It will be shown how the relationship between all three, and the president's awareness of and ability to work within this context, determines the extent to which a president is able to maintain presidential autonomy and control over the direction of US foreign policy. The chapter will argue that the constraints facing the president are not fixed. They change as a result of both exogenous factors beyond the president's control (the foreign policies of foreign states and elections to congress, for example) and directly as a result of presidential actions, such as choice of management style and decision-making. This three-stage comparative analysis will demonstrate the importance of developing a multilevel framework to

locate the role of presidential agency in US foreign policy and explain US Cold War policy during the Truman and Reagan administrations.

### **External sources and constraints: the international system**

The international system provides the external constraints each president must face in the formulation of foreign policy. These constraints, for the most part, take the shape of other states and their foreign policies. The nature of the system forms the heart of most structural IR theoretical explanations of foreign policy choices and outcomes. The key terms of the discipline are familiar: great powers, balance of power, security, national interests, intentions and uncertainty.<sup>1</sup> Each president must contend with an international system that is beyond their direct control. When trying to make foreign policy a president must ask how their actions will be interpreted in the governments of foreign states, how are these states likely to respond and what form will their foreign policy take? Just as US foreign policy is the result of a multitude of complex inputs, so too are the foreign policies of other states. The uncertainty and potential reprisals from powerful states present serious constraints for the US president.

#### ***Truman Example***

The international system confronting Truman was new, bringing forth greater uncertainty and increased tension. At the end of the Second World War the US found itself standing on the world stage as a true great power for the first time in its history. Its wartime ally, the Soviet Union, was victorious on the Eastern Front, although had suffered massive casualties and structural damage in the process. The traditional great powers of Western Europe had been ravaged by war and would not retain their status as great powers. The international system was now bipolar, dominated by the US and Soviet Union.

Although initially hopeful that the wartime alliance would continue, over the course of the first few years in office Truman bore witness to the breakdown of this relationship and the development of the geopolitical rivalry that became known as the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> The main external constraint facing Truman, therefore, was the existence of the Soviet Union. It stood as the US's main geopolitical rival militarily, economically, politically and ideologically. US foreign policy would have little direct influence in Eastern Europe where the Red Army had thousands of troops stationed and Truman had little desire to engage militarily with the Soviet Union. The Truman administration was also fearful of the spread of communism into other countries, either by direct Soviet intervention, domestic communist uprisings, or, worst of all, winning elections.<sup>3</sup>

In this context the Soviet Union was a constraint that could not be overcome in any literal sense, certainly not in the foreseeable future for Truman and his advisors. The USSR was not going anywhere. Early Cold War US

foreign policy would have to be formulated within these constraints, with Truman and his staff engaged in constant appraisal of what could and could not be done. This was demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4 where document after document highlighted the extent to which policy-makers were trying to evaluate how the Soviet Union would react, not just in Korea but fearful of reprisals in Berlin and throughout Europe. The minutes of these meetings present the image of a president dealing with a constant sense of uncertainty and fear in trying to formulate foreign policy in the shadow of the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

However, Truman was not paralysed by this fear and uncertainty. Instead, Truman decided to get the US into the Cold War. Having weighed up the strategic and ideological concerns of what he viewed as attempted Soviet incursion into the Mediterranean, Western Europe and Asia, Truman gave aid to Greece and Turkey, enunciated the Truman Doctrine, supported the Marshall Plan, oversaw the development of collective security arrangements, went to war in Korea to defend these, and overhauled the internal policy-making apparatus with the National Security Act of 1947. This was the birth of containment. The very name demonstrates the extent to which Truman viewed his policies as purely reactive in the face of Soviet hostility.

### *Reagan example*

President Reagan faced a similar international system. The Cold War continued, with few expecting it to end soon. The Soviet Union remained the other great power in the bipolar system of the 1980s and thus exerted the largest external constraint on the foreign policy options of Reagan. In the two decades since Truman had left office, the Cold War had cooled down in some respects whilst heating up in others. After 25 years the fear and uncertainty of the early post-war years had subsided. There was little chance of the Soviet Union taking over the world, if they even ever had the desire to, and the Cold War had become a routine. However, as a result of developments with nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, both the US and the Soviet Union now had the capability to destroy each other and the rest of the world. Mutually assured destruction placed an additional constraint on US foreign policy.

Reagan's view of the Soviet Union was underpinned by strong ideological convictions. The Soviet Union was a communist state and communists could not be trusted.<sup>5</sup> For Reagan, the US was a shining beacon of freedom and democracy. As the leader of the free world he rejected the idea of containment. Such a policy granted legitimacy to the Soviet Union when it was Reagan's goal to leave communism, and by default the Soviet Union, on the 'ash heap of history'.<sup>6</sup> Reagan required a reorientation of US foreign policy. He wanted to banish what he believed was the defeatist legacy of the Carter administration. If America was in decline then it was not terminal. To restore the US to her former glory, Reagan ordered a defence build-up, adopted a more overly aggressive rhetorical tone and diplomatic approach to the Soviet Union, and developed a policy of rollback that he hoped would chip away at

the outer limits of the 'evil empire.' This deliberate strategy of Reagan pushed the constraints of the international system to the very limit and increased tensions between the two states to their highest since the Cuban missile crisis.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Comparison***

In terms of a direct comparison of the external constraints Truman and Reagan faced, there are important differences and similarities. Both presidents were confronted with a bipolar international system. Whereas Truman faced a new and developing system with all the uncertainties this brought, Reagan operated within a more stable environment which, in theory, could have reduced tensions. However, although Truman confronted the new realities of nuclear warfare, and remains the only US president to have used atomic bombs, Reagan had to contend with the Soviet Union's second strike capability and the reality of mutually assured destruction. Although there were differences in the severity of potential retaliation, for both Truman and Reagan the Soviet Union served as the largest external constraint on their foreign policy choices. This is interesting in terms of IR theory because in purely structural terms, each president faced the same system. The US made up one half of the bipolar system, with the Soviet Union taking its place as the opposing pole. Adopting a purely structural approach would therefore explain very little in terms of developments between the two states. Neorealists would be restricted to focusing on changes in the balance of power and identifying examples of buck passing or bandwagoning. These approaches could not explain the development of containment or rollback, let alone their application in Korea and Nicaragua, two developing countries that should have been of little interest to the great powers of the US and Soviet Union. Therefore, only by developing a multi-level framework incorporating the role of agency can we explain these events.

Truman initially believed he could maintain good relations with the Soviet Union. He wanted to avoid further conflict after the devastation wrought by the Second World War. He had no love for dictatorships but he thought it would be possible for the US and Soviet Union to reach a diplomatic compromise that would satisfy both their interests. Truman's main concern was to maintain peace and, based on the lessons he had drawn from his study of history and the origins of war, he was prepared to work with the Soviet Union to achieve this. However, over time, Truman interpreted Soviet actions in Europe and Asia as hostile to the US and began to perceive them as a threat. By 1950 Truman had not only developed the policy of containment but was prepared to militarise it by entering the Korean War. In this sense Truman was a reactive president. He changed his view of the Soviet Union as a result of his interpretation of its actions and this proved crucial for the development of containment.<sup>8</sup>

Reagan was not so open-minded on entering office. He held strong negative views not only of dictatorships, but specifically communism and the state

structure which had developed in the Soviet Union. Reagan was an ideologue in the sense he believed in the superiority of liberal democracy, capitalism and the US. The foreign policy of the Soviet Union posed the greatest risk to these and so it was his duty as president to stop them. This is not to say Reagan was a warmonger. He held a genuine desire to abolish nuclear weapons.<sup>9</sup> But if he was to negotiate with the Soviet Union at any point then this could only be done from a position of strength.<sup>10</sup> Reagan was therefore more purposeful than Truman in initially shaping his foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. Reagan believed he had the solution: increased military strength, diplomatic confrontation and challenging the premises of containment with the development of roll-back. The defence build-up, hostile rhetoric of his first term and the development of policy in Nicaragua highlight the importance of Reagan's worldview.

### ***What this tells us about presidential autonomy***

The above analysis demonstrates there is a complex relationship at work between the external sources and constraints of US foreign policy, and the extent to which the president of the US is able to operate as an autonomous actor within these constraints. In the cases of Truman and Reagan, the existence of the Soviet Union was the greatest constraint on their foreign policy choices. Neither president was able to 'overcome' this constraint in the sense of 'defeating' the Soviet Union, or looking beyond it. However, what can be shown is the important role of the president's worldview in orienting the general foreign policy strategy of the US. Truman's reactive worldview contributed to the development of containment, whereas Reagan's purposeful worldview was the basis for reheating the Cold War and initiating the rollback policy. From within these broad parameters specific policies can be developed, as demonstrated by Truman sending aid to Greece and Turkey, and Reagan sending aid to the Contras. Thus, although the president is not 'overcoming' the constraints of the international system, he can orientate US foreign policy in the direction behind which he will try to build domestic political support. This is important for IR theory because it shows that structure and agency are not separate and both are required to fully explain international relations. Events at the system level are perceived by individual decision-makers and it is through their worldview that these events are given meaning. Is the event important? Does it pose a threat? Does it require a response? What form will the response take? The answers to these questions will depend on how the individual processes the information they receive. Reagan interpreted the actions of the Sandinistas as a threat to US national security. Liberal Democrats in Congress did not. Differences in worldview, and how these influence perceptions of the system, matter.

The challenge each president faces is to try and line up enough of the pieces within the fragmented system of US politics, specifically the executive bureaucracies responsible for designing and implementing these foreign policies, and the Congress who are responsible for funding, legislation and

representing the views of US society. It is these challenges this chapter must now address.

### **Internal sources and constraints: the executive bureaucracy**

The constitution designates the president as chief executive of the US government and grants him formal power over the bureaucracy. In theory, each member of the executive bureaucracy is under the command of the president. He is their senior manager. In an ideal world, the president would issue orders and the bureaucracy would obey. However, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, this is not the case. The bureaucracy is a complex web of powerful individuals and institutions, each with their own interests, who often compete with each other and the president for influence. This poses problems for the president as the bureaucrats may see him as a rival, disagree with his policies, or even try to work against him. This produces another potential constraint for presidential action. How the president works with the executive bureaucracy is crucial in determining the degree of presidential autonomy he is able to maintain, and determines how successful he will be in formulating foreign policy.

This section will focus on the management systems deployed by both presidents in their attempt to bring order to the bureaucracy. It focuses on the role of the president in bringing bureaucratic consensus to the executive and the extent to which this acts as a constraint on the president. How a president deals with divisions within his administration, both institutional and ideological is crucial. The key argument presented in this section is the degree to which the decisions made by the president influence the level of bureaucratic constraint he faces.

#### ***Truman example***

Management style is an attempt by the president to bring order to the chaos of the bureaucracy, to try and impose his will, and achieve the policy outcomes he desires. For Truman, this meant overhauling the competitive system of management employed by his predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt. The style of management developed by Roosevelt was freewheeling and ad-hoc. Tasks were given to different advisors at different times. These tasks were often split between advisors with the president neglecting to tell his staff that other members of the team were performing the same duty. This was a deliberate ploy by Roosevelt. Once each advisor became aware they were competing with each other, they would have to bring their disputes to the president for resolution. In the process of doing so, Roosevelt believed he would have access to more information, would be able to keep tighter control of his bureaucrats and thus increase his presidential autonomy.<sup>11</sup>

Truman disagreed with Roosevelt, viewing the competitive system as an unnecessary constraint on the flow of information and impeding effective



decision-making. Drawing on his experience from the army and Senate, he instituted a formal management system. Truman established clear lines of authority and jurisdiction, granting cabinet heads responsibility for specific policy areas and worked to build close relationships with these top-level advisors. In the area of foreign policy this was supplemented with institutional reorganisation brought about by the National Security Act of 1947 and the creation of the National Security Council. Regularity was enforced with weekly meetings between the president and his secretaries of state and defense, weekly meetings of the cabinet and, from 1950, weekly meetings of the NSC. Truman placed his faith in the formalist system, the loyalty of his advisors, and stuck rigidly to this.<sup>12</sup>

In the early years of the Truman administration there was tension between two groups in the foreign policy bureaucracy: those who viewed the Soviet Union in realist terms as a traditional great power who could be treated like any other, and those who believed the Soviet Union was a revolutionary state who wanted to overthrow the capitalist world order and replace it with worldwide communism. Initially, President Truman found it difficult to subscribe wholly to either camp and tried to find the middle ground between the two. The combination of bureaucratic incoherence, magnified by the president's own indecision, placed restrictions on Truman's ability to produce a coherent strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union during the first two years of his administration. He despised authoritarianism, but he hoped the US could work with the Soviet Union to avoid another war. However, Truman began to read Soviet actions in Iran, Berlin and Eastern Europe as hostile, and over the course of his first term developed the Cold War mindset. With Truman subscribing to the view of the Soviet Union as a revolutionary state, the influence of the realists was diminished. There did not seem to be a deliberate attempt by Truman to limit the influence of the realists, for example, he was not actively removing them from office. However, he did not actively seek their input. The victory of the Cold Warriors allowed Truman to not only develop the policy of containment, but to militarise it in the second term. This demonstrates the impact presidential worldview can have on bringing coherence to the foreign policy bureaucracy. It does not guarantee good decision-making, as shall be discussed, but it does help remove bureaucratic restraints and increase a president's scope for action.<sup>13</sup>

The effect of the one group beginning to dominate as the president's worldview solidified towards the Cold War mindset helped overcome bureaucratic constraints as it brought a level of agreement amongst his top-level advisors, which was strengthened by Truman's formal system. Thus it was easier for Truman to achieve bureaucratic consensus within his foreign policy team, allowing him increased influence in the policy-making process. This can be seen in the decision to send aid to Greece and the development of the Truman Doctrine. When news of British withdrawal from Greece was received by the US, Truman was able to mould bureaucratic consent behind the assessment that the Soviet Union would try and dominate the

Mediterranean unless the US intervened.<sup>14</sup> Truman was then able to present a united front to Congress in support of his plan for foreign aid. This is most notable in the presentations made by Truman, Marshall and Acheson during their meeting with congressional leaders in the run up to the Truman Doctrine speech and the congressional vote on aid to Greece.<sup>15</sup> By presenting a united front, Truman was able to convince Senator Vandenberg of the seriousness of the Soviet threat and enlist his support in securing the necessary votes for the aid bill to pass in Congress.

However, bureaucratic consensus does not always help a president. Indeed, as Chapter 4 demonstrates, excessive bureaucratic consensus can produce negative results. In the case of Korea, the ideological conformity which had developed during the first five years of the Truman administration proved a limitation on the president's decision-making. The combination of an external crisis and intra-group solidarity, the result of ideological conformity and intra-group loyalty, placed unintended restrictions on Truman's management system in the shape of groupthink. The major weakness that developed was a reliance on too few advisors, all of whom shared similar Cold War mindsets, which resulted in the suppression of dissenting views and intelligence warnings of Chinese intervention. As a result, President Truman made the decision not only to authorise US troops to cross the 38th parallel, but to allow them to push ever closer to the Chinese border, leading to the Chinese intervention of November 1950 and the years of stalemate which followed. In this example, Truman's management style and the ideological conformity within his administration created the necessary conditions for groupthink, which placed unnoticed and unintentional constraints on his decision-making.<sup>16</sup>

### *Reagan example*

A recurring theme of US foreign policy is, on arrival in the Oval Office, the new president is critical of the management system employed by his predecessor. This was no different with President Reagan in 1981. He had been a vocal detractor not only of President Carter's policies, but of the bureaucratic processes involved in formulating them. Carter had created an additional bureaucratic constraint for himself by failing to properly define the relationship between his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, and National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Reagan claimed the Carter administration was 'unable to speak with one voice in foreign policy' because of the bureaucratic chaos resulting from the Vance and Brzezinski relationship.<sup>17</sup>

Reagan attempted to bring clarity to his foreign policy team by adopting a formalist management style, downgrading the role of the NSA and claiming to give his Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, pride of place in the foreign policy executive. However, this set-up was distorted by Reagan's decision to run foreign policy through the NSC and set up the inter-agency process. This suggested the secretary of state would not hold the same role in the Reagan administration as had been promised. There is no rule to say that the

secretary of state must be the leading figure in any president's foreign policy team, nor are they required for effective policy-making. The legacy of Kissinger's years as NSA during the Nixon administration offers evidence to support this. Reagan's inter-agency process may have functioned smoothly with a reduced role for the secretary of state. The problem, however, was the conflicting messages Reagan was sending. The president was empowering Haig in public and in private meetings with his secretary, but he was weakening him by developing the inter-agency foreign policy process. This did not create the clear lines of jurisdiction and hierarchy that are essential for the smooth operation of a formal management system.

This was compounded by Reagan's reliance on the 'troika' of Chief-of-Staff James Baker, Deputy Chief-of-Staff Michael Deaver and White House Counsellor Edwin Meese. This overt politicisation of the foreign policy process became problematic on several fronts. This first was the extent to which the 'palace guard' controlled access to the president. Reagan's first Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, complained that the White House staff limited his access to the president, to the extent he was only able to meet with Reagan once during the transition from election to inauguration, and continued to struggle with the troika throughout his year in office.<sup>18</sup> The president has a limited amount of time in his daily schedule and will not be able to meet with every member of staff who demands the chief executive's attention. However, by limiting the access of the secretary of state, the president sows the seeds for bureaucratic conflict which, if left unchecked, lessens their ability to control the executive and direct foreign policy.

Reagan also struggled to decide on what role he wanted his national security advisor to play in the inter-agency process. Initially he downgraded the role of the NSA, expecting them to act purely as a manager of the NSC and its staff, to help the president hear as many bureaucratic voices as possible, and not to engage in policy advocacy. Even though Reagan did not want the NSA to play a policy advocate role, the NSA still required bureaucratic muscle to carry out the day-to-day management tasks of the NSC. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, this did not happen because of the excessive involvement of Reagan's palace guard. His troika acted as a wall between the Oval Office and the president. In the case of the NSA, they did not initially have any direct access to the president. Richard Allen was forced to report to Reagan's White House Councillor, Edwin Meese. Access was restricted, and as a result the NSA could not do their job of making sure Reagan was briefed from all sides. Without the support of Reagan, Allen was in no position to exert any influence and was reduced to trying to 'shove decision documents and position papers' down the 'funnel-like management system that Meese had created to spare Reagan from decision-making'.<sup>19</sup> Unable to work in this environment, Richard Allen quit in January 1982.

Over the course of his eight years in office Reagan was unable to establish clear lines of jurisdiction between his secretaries of state and national security advisors. Upgrading the NSA and granting them direct access to the

president in 1982 should have helped, but this was not the case. Reagan never settled into a consistent relationship with any of his foreign policy team. He worked well with Allen's replacement, William Clark, but sidelined him after the appointment of George Shultz as secretary of state. This seemingly productive relationship was tarnished by the Iran-Contra scandal when Reagan cut Shultz out of the decision-making process and developed policy in secret with NSAs Robert McFarlane and John Poindexter. Reagan's inability to involve himself in these bureaucratic battles, let alone resolve them in any meaningful manner, placed constraints on his ability to formulate foreign policy, as can be shown over the course of eight years in Nicaragua.<sup>20</sup>

Reagan's relationship with the bureaucracy was driven by ideology from the start. Reagan entered the White House with an ideological worldview of international politics. The Soviet Union was the greatest threat to the national security of the US. As a communist state they were not to be trusted. Reagan viewed US-Soviet Union relations in simple terms. The US was a liberal-democracy and a shining beacon of good in the world. The Soviet Union was evil and responsible for the Cold War. Having been elected on a promise to restore the US to its former glory, Reagan was determined to surround himself with advisors who shared similar views and supported his policy programme. Reagan created a separate staff of over 100 people whose job was to screen candidates for 'philosophy as well as competency and integrity'.<sup>21</sup> This was a deliberate attempt by Reagan to assert his control over the bureaucracy. By filling the top positions of the bureaucracy with as many conservative ideologues as he could, Reagan hoped to reduce constraints and increase presidential autonomy in the policy-making process. For most of the big policies of the first term, the military build-up, defence budget increases and tax cuts, the ideological influence on the bureaucracies proved successful. However, it was also a significant factor in the debacle in Nicaragua.

There was ideological agreement within the Reagan administration on foreign policy to the extent the Soviet Union was viewed as the primary rival and security threat to the US. However, deep division existed over the severity of this threat and the policies required to meet the threat. Two rival camps were formed within Reagan's foreign policy team. The first group became known as the hardliners. They believed the Soviet Union had exploited the era of detente to aggressively expand their influence in the developing world. As a result, they argued US foreign policy in the developing world, in the form of the Reagan Doctrine, must be targeted on direct intervention. Diplomacy was of little use and 'a sell-out to communism'.<sup>22</sup> The second group was known as the moderates. They argued that Reagan Doctrine intervention was only part of a broader strategy, which needed to include diplomacy in the hope of settling regional conflicts peacefully. This was conceptualised in Secretary of State Shultz's 'dual-track strategy'.<sup>23</sup> These tensions came to a head over Nicaragua. They helped to reinforce the institutional division between the National Security Council staff and the State Department as the former was dominated by hardliners such as NSAs Richard Allen,

William Clark, Robert McFarlane and John Poindexter, whereas the State Department was home to the majority of moderates such as Secretary of State Shultz and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas Enders.

Over the course of his eight years in office, Reagan struggled to smooth these divisions. On the topic of Nicaragua he positioned himself closer to the hardliners, as he shared their views on the nature and extent of the Soviet threat in Central America. However, he did not make this clear to his advisors and he did not work hard to resolve the tensions within his administration and promote bureaucratic compromise. Instead, as the document analysis of the declassified NSC meetings in the previous chapter demonstrated, Reagan cut the moderates out of the decision-making process. When discussing third country funding for the Contras, Reagan did not tell the rest of his advisors that he had already authorised MacFarlane and Poindexter to secure third country funding.<sup>24</sup> By deliberately cutting out leading officials such as Secretary of State Shultz he limited the sources of information he was hearing, particularly those from the moderates who would have told him it was a bad idea. By setting in motion the events that would eventually lead to Iran-Contra, Reagan significantly decreased both his presidential autonomy and destroyed his Nicaragua policy.

### *Comparison*

The important point to note is that not all foreign policy discussions involving the president will take place at fully attended regular meetings. The complexity and sheer amount of time required to address foreign policy issues renders this impractical. Therefore, that Truman would hold regular private meetings with Acheson did not signal a breakdown in his management style in the same way as Reagan. Truman made it clear that all options and decisions would be made through the official channels, which by 1950 meant through the National Security Council.<sup>25</sup> Anything decided outside of the NSC would be brought to the table to keep the relevant parties informed. This was a deliberate attempt by Truman to place limitations on his senior advisors and limit the possibility of end runs into the Oval Office. Truman did not want to make foreign policy on the fly and his formal management style was his attempt to bring the executive under his control. By granting specific jurisdictions to the senior members of his administration and allowing them to operate free from excessive interference, Truman hoped this would generate loyalty to his programme and increase effective policy-making.

This is not what happened with Reagan. On the surface Reagan appeared to be running a formalist system, but rather than stamping out end runs as Truman had done, Reagan allowed them to take place within his executive. In large part this was the result of his inability to properly define the relationship between his national security advisors and secretaries of state, and by default the relationship between the State Department and the National Security

Council. The lack of clear jurisdictions and defined roles generated deficiencies in policy-making from the earliest months of the administration. The most notable deficiency arose out of Nicaragua policy-making. Reagan was aware of the divisions between the moderates and hardliners as their views were aired at NSC and NSPG meetings.<sup>26</sup> However, rather than trying to work out a compromise between the two factions, or making it clear he supported the hardliners, Reagan decided to work outside the established channels of his formal system to empower his NSA and the NSC staff to secretly develop the hardliners' policy of using third country donors and private citizens to fund the Contras in Nicaragua. It is difficult to imagine Truman treating Acheson or Marshall in the same way as Reagan treated Shultz.<sup>27</sup>

Reagan was unable to stand back and address the deficiencies in the process. He went through six national security advisors in eight years. There was constant tension between his NSA and secretaries of state. There were ideological divisions within his administration. It would be beyond the power of even the greatest of bureaucratically minded presidents to solve all of these problems completely. However, Reagan never made a conscious effort to systematically address these issues. As was discussed in the previous chapter, when Shultz brought these questions to Reagan's attention, the Secretary was fobbed off with little in the way of acknowledgement.<sup>28</sup> These problems could never be resolved, or at least diminished, without a sustained level of presidential involvement. The individual players would not have the bureaucratic muscle required to make the necessary changes. Only the president could do this. By not addressing these issues, Reagan fundamentally weakened his executive and the efficacy of his policy-making process. The breakdown of his Nicaragua policy stands as the most relevant example of this.

It is interesting to note the role played by ideology in the Truman and Reagan administrations and the impact this had on presidential autonomy. Initially it seemed Reagan was able to use the appointment process to successfully fill his staff and bureaucracy with fellow ideologues.<sup>29</sup> To an extent this was true, especially in relation to his first term foreign policy, which focused on increased defence spending and developing a tougher policy towards the Soviet Union. However, ideological divisions soon appeared over the extent of the Soviet threat and how the Reagan Doctrine should be applied. These ideological divisions were then reinforced by the institutional rivalries between the NSC staff and the State Department. These divisions hampered the formulation of Nicaragua policy and asked more of President Reagan as manager of the executive than he was able to deliver.

This contrasts with the Truman administration. During the first years of the Truman presidency US policy-makers faced the challenges of the post-war environment, the decline of the traditional European powers and the arrival of the US and Soviet Union as world powers. As a result, there was no dominant ideology within the administration. Two competing schools of thought regarding the Soviet Union and the direction of US foreign policy emerged.<sup>30</sup> The realists argued the Soviet Union were just like every other

historic great power, concerned with maximising their power, security and influence within the existing international system. They were concerned not with the internal workings of the Soviet state, but with their external behaviour. As a result, the Soviet Union could be treated just like any other great power and foreign policy could be directed along traditional diplomatic lines, with the possibility of cooperation remaining an option. The second group did not accept the view of the realists. They rejected the view of the Soviet Union as another great power looking to secure its position within the international system. Instead, the Soviet Union was a revolutionary state who wished to overthrow the capitalist world order and replace it with worldwide communism. To explain the Soviet Union's foreign policy, these analysts argued that US foreign policy must concern itself not just with calculations of power and interest, but also ideology.

A detailed understanding of the characteristics of the Soviet state was crucial to predict and counter Soviet foreign policy. As discussed in the previous chapters, Truman struggled initially to locate his own worldview within these two groups, but in light of what he viewed as Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe and Asia, he eventually moved closer to the ideologues and contributed to both the development of the Cold War mindset and the dominance of this group in the US foreign policy bureaucracy.

### ***What this tells us about presidential autonomy***

The relationship between the president and the executive bureaucracy is crucial, and is based on more than the president commanding and those below him obeying. An important example of this is the Truman Doctrine speech discussed previously. It was shown how bureaucrats worked to shape the speech in line with Truman's preferences. This demonstrates how presidents do not necessarily have to command their subordinates to achieve compliance. By making their preferences clear, and by establishing well-organised bureaucratic channels and jurisdictions, subordinates in the policy-making process are able to pre-empt presidential instructions and begin shaping policy in the direction of pre-established presidential preference. This is one way the president can overcome bureaucratic constraints. However, this does not preclude bureaucrats from ignoring these presidential signals and working to their own personal or institutional agenda. It is important to note, though, this would be a deliberate act of policy sabotage by the individual or groups involved; it would not be the result of presidential action.

Highlighting the role of the president in the executive is also important. He is another player in the complex environment of the bureaucracy, but he is not an equal player. The president has the ability to lessen the constraints of the bureaucracy. In the examples discussed above, the importance of a president's worldview and management style were demonstrated. These are tools the president can use to attempt to generate consensus on the direction US foreign policy should take, and to try and generate enough support amongst

top-level bureaucrats. To do this requires clear instructions from the president so that the executive are aware of his preferences and are able to shape policy along these lines. Again, this will not guarantee policy success, but it will help to lessen the internal constraints placed on the president by the bureaucracy. It is also important because it demonstrates the role the president as an individual plays in trying to maximise his autonomy in the decision-making process. The president has choices to make in terms of how they will manage their executive. These choices can play a significant role in decreasing or increasing the potential constraints placed on the president by the bureaucracy.

The president's own choices play a large part in determining the constraints they face. Reagan demonstrates the extent to which a president's inability to manage divisions within his administration can increase these constraints. This is clear on two fronts. First there was the level of institutional division, most notably between the White House staff and the wider bureaucracy. In the case of foreign policy, this struggle usually takes place between the State Department and the National Security Council staff. At the highest level of the administration, this takes the form of a bureaucratic rivalry between the secretary of state and the national security advisor; the ranking officials within these institutions. The second divisions can be classified as ideological. This is the degree to which advisors within the administration disagree on matters of policy. If these policy disagreements coincide with institutional divisions, the president faces an even larger constraint. From the Reagan example, it can be shown how central the president is in creating a productive working relationship between these institutions and individuals; particularly as Reagan was unable to do so. This demonstrates the extent to which the president has a role to play in determining the influence of bureaucratic constraints. By not being able to establish clear jurisdictions between these institutions, or improve the working relationship between the hardliners and moderates over Nicaragua policy, Reagan made life difficult for himself. He created avoidable constraints and as a result decreased his presidential autonomy in the policy-making process. This can be contrasted with Truman's success with the Truman Doctrine, where he was able to unify his bureaucracy and present a united front to Congress.

This is not to say that bureaucratic consensus is the answer to the president's problems. It is not. From the previous chapters examples can be drawn to show when bureaucratic consensus proved beneficial to the president (Truman with Greece, Reagan with the arms build-up), when bureaucratic conflict reduced presidential autonomy (Reagan and Nicaragua, specifically Iran-Contra) and even when bureaucratic consensus brought problems for the president (Truman with Korea). Therefore, the important conclusion to draw is the role of the president in being able to identify when bureaucratic consensus will help him achieve his goals and the necessity for this bureaucratic consensus to be constructed in the appropriate manner with either widely accepted compromises or publicly declared presidential instructions. This is



especially true if the president is running a formal management system. End runs into the Oval Office and the president meeting with select officials behind the backs of other key advisors is likely to limit his presidential authority. The president also has to be aware of his information sources. If he is relying on too few advisors, or is hearing the same advice, it is his responsibility to ensure he hears other voices, and that his advisors know he is taking onboard new views. From the examples discussed throughout this book it is clear the president as an individual has an important role to play in reducing the constraints they face and maximising presidential autonomy.

These examples serve as evidence for the wider argument being made in this study. That is, the president, through their own choices, plays a crucial role in determining the extent of bureaucratic constraints and opportunities they face. In doing so they are responsible for securing a degree of presidential autonomy. They cannot overcome all constraints, and cannot guarantee policy success, but they, as individuals, have the potential to make their relationship with the bureaucracy easier, if they know how to operate and adapt.

### **Domestic sources and constraints: Congress**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the constitution created a political system where power is separated and shared amongst the three branches of the federal government. In the area of foreign policy, this means that presidential foreign policy-making is constrained by the constitutional powers of Congress. The president is commander-in-chief of the armed forces, but Congress has the power to declare war. The president signs treaties, but they must be ratified by the Senate. As always, Congress is granted the power of the purse. This means that the president must achieve congressional support to fund their foreign policies. Thus, how a president interacts with Congress is central to the success of any foreign policy.

#### ***Truman example***

The idea is often presented that Congress was more accommodating in the early years of the Cold War.<sup>31</sup> It can be shown that it was more nuanced than this, especially in Truman's first term. As Richard Neustadt has argued:

This does not mean that when the Cold War did occur dissent from presidential actions and proposals in the foreign field was altogether superseded. Far from it. Congressional bi-partisanship in foreign policy for the most part extended only to Europe and Japan, not to the world at large, especially not to China.<sup>32</sup>

There were several groups within Congress who tried to make life difficult for Truman in the area of foreign policy. First and foremost were the isolationists.

They rejected the need for increased US activism abroad and the resulting budget increases this would require.<sup>33</sup> Second were the 'Asia first' Republicans. This group wanted Truman to direct the containment policy towards Asia. This opposition magnified with the victory of Mao and the communists in 1949. These Republicans tried to blame Truman for the 'loss' of China and criticised him for focusing too many resources on Western Europe at the expense of Asia. It is difficult to establish if this was a genuine concern for US foreign policy in the Far East, or if it was political point scoring by Republicans in the hope of exploiting the Cold War to accuse Truman and the Democrats of being weak in the face of communist aggression. The furore surrounding Senator Joseph McCarthy and his 'anti-American activities' committee lends credence to this.<sup>34</sup>

How did Truman overcome this opposition? The events leading up to the Truman Doctrine played a crucial role. He did several things to increase his chances of congressional success. First, he met with the ranking members of the congressional foreign policy committees. In particular, his relationship with Senator Vandenberg was crucial. As discussed in the previous section, Truman was able to present a unified bureaucratic consensus to the senator. The combination of Truman, Marshall and Acheson was successful in convincing Vandenberg of the seriousness of the Greek and Turkish situations.<sup>35</sup> Vandenberg was then able to use his influence within the congressional committee system to spread the president's message and to prepare the relevant senior congressmen for the forthcoming vote on aid to Greece.<sup>36</sup>

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the Truman Doctrine speech played an important role in generating wider support and cementing the mindset amongst a majority of congressmen. There was also helpful input from Vandenberg, demonstrating the extent to which members of Congress can improve the president's position in the foreign policy process. Vandenberg explained to Truman, Acheson and Marshall that if the president was planning to address both houses of Congress and the wider US public, it would be necessary to use strong and clear language. By this, the senator meant that framing the Greek and Turkish situation purely in dry terms of US geostrategic interest in the Mediterranean would not be particularly useful. He had listened to Marshall make the case for US intervention in these terms and had not been convinced. It was only when Truman gave Acheson permission to speak and the then assistant secretary of state outlined the threat of communist expansion in a more passionate and emotive style, focusing on the threat to Western European democracy, that Vandenberg became convinced of the severity of the situation. Congress and the American people would be more supportive if Greece and Turkey were placed within a global context and discussed in terms of the threat posed to democracy. The simple dichotomy of good versus evil would likely secure votes in Congress and bring the developing Cold War to the attention of a wider public.<sup>37</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter's analysis of the development of the Truman Doctrine, Truman's speech writers were already working on these

ideas, in line with the president's preferences. The confirmation from Vandenberg that this was the correct way to proceed strengthened Truman's position. The combination of Truman's speech and Vandenberg's assistance led to the House passing the bill 287 to 107 and the Senate voting in favour 67 to 23. Truman's relationship with Congress was essential in passing the aid bill and laying the foundations for the development of the containment policy.

### *Reagan example*

By the administration of Ronald Reagan, the relationship between the president and Congress in the area of foreign policy had developed. The Cold War had been ongoing for 30 years. Tensions between the US and the Soviet Union had not disappeared, but there was an air of normalcy about the structure of the international system. The course of the Cold War had had an impact on relations between the branches of the US government. By the 1970s, scholars were discussing the rise of the 'imperial presidency' and the extent to which the executive had usurped foreign policy power at the expense of Congress.<sup>38</sup> However, after the Vietnam War, Congress had reasserted itself, passing the War Powers Act of 1973 and tried to reign in what it saw as presidential excess in the area of discretionary and reprogrammed funding. The result was the administrations of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter giving rise to debate as to whether the presidency was in fact 'imperilled' rather than imperial in its relationship with Congress.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, when Reagan entered office, he was met with several congressional constraints in the area of foreign policy. The first related to the international system. After 30 years of Cold War, relations between the Soviet Union and the US were still tense. However, the air of uncertainty that plagued the early years of the Cold War during the Truman administration had noticeably decreased. This had a marked effect on many congressmen. Instead of preparing to acquiesce to presidential authority in the area of foreign policy, as had defined much of presidential-congressional relations until the early 70s, Congress was now prepared to challenge the executive over control of US foreign policy. The most notable example of congressional fight back was the passing of the War Powers Act of 1973. This was a deliberate attempt by Congress to rein in the power of the president in the area of national security policy and the use of US force abroad. The act stipulated that the president must notify congress within 48 hours of the deployment of troops to military action and must withdraw US forces within 90 days, unless congress authorises the use of force or declares war.<sup>40</sup> This was the domestic political environment Reagan faced in trying to formulate foreign policy.

The context of foreign policy in Nicaragua highlighted these constraints, and also created additional ones. As the documentary record showed, Reagan and his advisors ranked Sandinista control of Nicaragua as a major security threat to the US. They believed the Sandinistas were a front for further Soviet intervention in Central America. The fear was, having established a foothold

on the mainland, the Sandinistas, backed by Cuba and the Soviet Union, would try to seize power in the surrounding states, such as El Salvador. Reagan was not prepared to allow this to happen.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately for the president, congressmen in both the House and the Senate did not agree on his assessment of the threat posed by the Sandinistas, or that they were the spearhead for a Soviet-backed Cuban invasion of Central America. This was compounded by the divided government Reagan faced. The Democrats maintained control of the House for his eight years in office, Republicans held the Senate for his first six years. Reagan was therefore unable to command a consistent majority of voters in Congress to support his application of the Reagan Doctrine to Nicaragua. The combination of congressional resurgence in foreign policy, divided government, and perception of the threat posed by the Sandinistas and Soviet Union, placed limitations on the options available to Reagan. There would be no public and congressional support for the use of US military force in Nicaragua so Reagan had to find other options.

As always, it is important to note that these constraints are not fixed. External events can develop, the whole House and a third of the Senate are up for re-election every two years, and congressmen can change their vote. The president can have an important role to play in re-shaping the constraints they face.

In the case of Reagan and Nicaragua, the fixed positions of the liberal Democrats who continually opposed Reagan, and the conservative Republicans who supported him, never constituted an outright majority in both branches of government over Reagan's two terms in office. Thus, on the topic of Nicaragua, Reagan was presented with a selection of swing voters who would determine whether each successive request for funds for the Contras would be successful. The fact that Congress veered from the outright ban on Contra funding with the passing of the Boland amendments in 1984, to authorising \$100 million of military aid in 1986, demonstrates there was room for manoeuvre. It is therefore important to examine how these swing voters were influenced and to locate the role of President Reagan in loosening his congressional restraints between 1984 and 1986. Particularly important is how Reagan turned a 222 to 210 vote against Contra funding in March 1986 into a 221–209 vote in favour in June.

One of Reagan's greatest strengths was his command of political rhetoric. To try and convince Congress, and the American people, of the need for Contra funding, the president initiated an intensive public relations campaign to demonstrate the severity of the threat posed by the Sandinistas. Full-page advertisements were taken out in newspapers claiming that if the Contras were defeated the US would be swamped with 'refugees, spies, criminals and terrorists'.<sup>42</sup> Reagan himself addressed reporters saying:

If we provide too little help, our choice will be a Communist Central America with Communist subversion spreading southward and northward. We face the risk that a hundred million people, from Panama to our open southern border, could come under the control of pro-Soviet

regimes and threaten the United States with violence, economic chaos, and a human tidal wave of refugees.<sup>43</sup>

This was a ploy by Reagan to increase the fear of immigration in the southern border states and to get the citizens of these states to place pressure on Democrat House members to vote in favour of Contra funding.<sup>44</sup>

Reagan also personally intervened in the process. He asked his staff to identify potential swing voters and invite them for a meeting in the White House. Using his personal charm, the congressmen's respect for the office of the presidency and his popularity with the electorate, Reagan was able to convince several congressmen to change their votes, including two Democrats from Kentucky.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, external events helped loosen congressional restraint. In March, Sandinista government forces launched an attack on Contra bases in Honduras. Then, in April the Contras announced that their president, Daniel Ortega, would be visiting General Secretary Gorbachev of the Soviet Union in Moscow at the beginning of May.<sup>46</sup> Reagan was able to exploit this by placing a trade embargo on Nicaragua. This further weakened southern liberal Democrats in an election year. On 25 June the House voted 221 to 209 in favour of sending \$100 million to the Contras, 75% of which was military aid, and authorised the CIA and Department of Defense to train and provide intelligence to the Contras.

Representative Michael Barnes explains how influential Reagan was in the process: 'The guys in the middle just got tired of being beaten up on both sides ... they knew Reagan was going to come back and back and back on this. He was obsessed by it ... He just wore everybody out'.<sup>47</sup> As Cynthia Arnson has argued, 'when a president as popular as Ronald Reagan made an issue his primary foreign policy goal, it was just a matter of time until he got what he wanted'.<sup>48</sup> Two years of intense legislative effort and public relations endeavours had been rewarded. This demonstrates the ability of the president to influence Congress and shape the direction of US foreign policy.

Unfortunately for Reagan and his administration, a president's actions can also increase the level of constraint presented by Congress. As discussed in the previous chapter, Reagan played a central role in the debacle of Nicaragua policy. In large part this was a result of his dealings with Congress, or more accurately, his attempts not to deal with them. Reagan was determined to first halt the spread of arms from Nicaragua to El Salvador and, preferably, remove the Sandinistas from power.<sup>49</sup> However, there was no realistic chance of using US troops to achieve this end. Another option was required. It was on this basis that Reagan authorised \$20 million dollars to be sent to the Contras and, more controversially, the deployment of 500 CIA operatives to interdict arms in November and December 1981.<sup>50</sup> This was the birth of covert US involvement in Nicaragua.

The Hughes-Ryan Act of 1974 required the president to present a finding to the intelligence committees in both houses of Congress if covert action was initiated by the CIA. The rules laid down in the act were a deliberate attempt

by Congress to increase their oversight of US covert action. The law also required the head of the CIA to appear before the committees to answer any questions Congress may have about the nature and scope of the covert operations being undertaken by the US government.<sup>51</sup> Thus, if covert actions were to form the centrepiece of US policy in Nicaragua, Congress, by law, was to be kept fully informed.

The vague language used in the still not fully declassified presidential findings ('support and conduct ... paramilitary operations against ... Nicaragua') combined with the evasiveness and incoherence of Director Casey's briefings of the intelligence committees, reflect the extent to which Reagan was prepared to limit congressional knowledge of US covert actions in Nicaragua. Committee questions over several briefings around the topic of escalation, the exact role of the CIA, and whether the US was trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua were not answered with any great detail.<sup>52</sup>

The most notable incident where below standard presidential findings and executive briefings of the intelligence committees resulted in increased congressional opposition to Reagan was the decision to allow the CIA to mine harbours in Nicaragua in 1984. The plan was formulated by a selection of hardliners in the NSC and was presented to Reagan outside of formal channels. When Reagan authorised the mission, he did so without asking for a formal review of the plan from his senior staff or the joint chiefs.<sup>53</sup> This again demonstrates the weakness of Reagan's management and decision-making style. In terms of congressional relations the decision to mine the harbours was a disaster. The intelligence committees had not been briefed as required by law. When news broke of the operation in the US media, even the most supportive of congressmen, Barry Goldwater, the senate intelligence committee chairman turned against Reagan:

It gets down to one, little, simple phrase: I am pissed off! ... The President has asked us to back his foreign policy. Bill, how can we back his foreign policy when we don't know what the hell he is doing? ... But mine the harbours of Nicaragua? This is an act violating international law. It is an act of war. For the life of me, I don't see how we are going to explain it.<sup>54</sup>

The House and Senate were quick to follow this up and voted in May 1984 for a ban on all funds for use in military or covert activities against Nicaragua, the so called Boland Amendment. President Reagan and his attempt to keep Congress out of Nicaragua policy by failing to keep the intelligence committees informed of covert activities led directly to these increased congressional restraints.

President Reagan's attempts between 1984 and 1986 to get around these limitations also demonstrate how a president can increase the level of congressional opposition further. By authorising the search for third country and private donors, even though Congress had banned US funding of the Contras, Reagan initiated events which would culminate in the Iran-Contra scandal of 1986, resulting in congressional investigations, criminal proceedings

and the end of Reagan's policy in Nicaragua. This was a deliberate attempt by a president to bypass congressional restrictions, but the result was increased congressional opposition just at the time Reagan was beginning to make progress with votes in Congress on the subject of resuming legitimate funding of the Contras.

### ***Comparison***

Comparing a single president's relationship with Congress over their time in office is difficult. A two term president will face four different Congresses. The relationship will not be fixed and will vary across time and policies. This is clear from the Reagan example. Comparing two presidents' relationships with Congress therefore offers additional challenges.

In the area of foreign policy it would be possible to draw a simple conclusion from the two case studies in this book: Truman had it easier than Reagan. Truman had the benefit of Democrat control of both houses for six out of eight years. Reagan's Republicans only had the Senate for six years and never held the House. Truman faced the 'acquiescent' Congress of the first half of the Cold War, whereas Reagan dealt with post-Vietnam resurgence. However, on closer inspection, this conclusion and the premises on which it is based can be challenged. In terms of simple divided government, Truman faced Republican control of the House and Senate between 1945 and 1947. The 'Do Nothing Congress', as Truman styled them, almost shut down his entire domestic legislative programme.<sup>55</sup> In the field of foreign policy, Truman was faced with strong isolationist sentiment within the Republican party. This was complemented by a majority of Republicans who accused Truman of ignoring East Asia, specifically China, in favour of Western Europe. However, in the face of this opposition, Truman managed to convince a Republican Congress to vote in favour of aid to Greece and Turkey.

The counter argument is Congress was merely responding to the threat posed by communism and thus the external environment was the driving force. However, this too can be challenged. From the analysis of primary documents in the Truman chapter, Senator Vandenberg made it clear to Truman it was not guaranteed the aid bill would pass. In fact it would require direct presidential involvement by way of a speech to a joint session of Congress. The speech would have to sell the aid programme to Congress and the American people on the wider ideals of upholding freedom and democracy in the face of authoritarian aggression. Truman's relationship with Vandenberg was also crucial.<sup>56</sup> Once the president was able to convince Vandenberg of the necessity of aid to Greece, the Senator became an important congressional ally in marshalling Republican votes.<sup>57</sup>

### ***What this tells us about presidential autonomy***

The wider point to be made is that external events are important in terms of providing a president with opportunities and constraints, but these do not

determine relationships between the president and Congress. How the president makes use of these external events is important. Reagan was able to achieve Congressional success when he was able to portray Ortega's visit to Moscow and the Sandinista attack on Contra bases in Honduras as a threat to US national security. He framed these incidents as examples of the point he had been trying to make for the previous five years. Congress assented and voted to send aid to the Contras.

A president's relationship with Congress is also crucial in determining the level of opposition they face. Truman was relatively open with Congress, even if he was guilty of overselling the Soviet threat in Greece and Turkey. The result of this openness was less hostility than might have been expected from a Republican Congress. Reagan, however, was rather duplicitous in his dealings with Congress over Nicaragua. By not informing Congress of the decision to mine the harbours and search for third country and private donors, the president made a rod for his own back. The deliberate attempt to bypass Congress led to substantial opposition, first with the Boland Amendment and finally with the Iran-Contra hearings.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed three of the major sources of US foreign policy (the international system, the executive bureaucracy and the Congress) and their relationship with the president. In particular, it has argued that the president has a crucial role to play in determining the extent to which these institutions act as constraints on his autonomy and his ability to direct US foreign policy. It has shown how important the president's worldview is in determining the overall direction of US foreign policy during their time in office. The reactive nature of Truman was crucial to the development of the policy of containment, whereas the ideological drive of Reagan orientated US foreign policy in a more aggressive manner towards the Soviet Union than had been experienced in the preceding decade.

The second argument presented was the role of the president's management style in determining the level of control they were able to exert over the bureaucracy, and the impact this had on effective policy-making. Examples were shown of both effective presidential management of the executive (the Truman Doctrine) and ineffective efforts (Reagan and Iran-Contra, and Truman's decision to cross the 38th parallel).

Finally, the chapter placed the presidency within the context of the system of separated powers constructed by the constitution. With foreign policy power shared between both branches, and Congress controlling US finances, the relationship a president develops with Congress becomes key in establishing a successful foreign policy. Truman was able to win over a Republican House and Senate to send aid to Greece and Turkey, while Reagan provided examples of both managing to secure funds from Congress for the Contras, and a complete cut-off of funds. The cyclical nature of the relationship



between Reagan and Congress over eight years of Nicaragua policy demonstrates that the legislative constraints facing a president are not fixed, and that the president as an autonomous actor is a crucial variable in determining the success and failure of this relationship.

In terms of the wider conceptual issues raised by the book, this chapter has demonstrated the importance of developing a multi-level framework which incorporates both agency and structure. The three sections of this chapter, focusing on the president's relationship with the international system, executive and Congress, have shown that a purely structural approach would be limited in its explanatory power. The international system does not exist separately from the states and individuals who populate it. Instead, events at the international level are given meaning by the extent to which they are perceived by individuals. As discussed previously, different individuals possess different worldviews and, as a result, perceive events differently. What is more, international relations are grounded in human agency. Foreign policy can only be operationalised as a result of the decisions made by individuals. Therefore how and why these decisions are made become crucial to any understanding of international relations. In terms of US foreign policy, the relationship between the president, the executive and the congress remains central to our explanations.

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## 8 Conclusion

### Introduction

This book has analysed the role of presidential agency in US foreign policy. It conducted a case study comparison of the foreign policies of Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan, developing a multi-level analytical framework focusing on the president's interaction with the international system, the executive and the Congress. This final chapter will conclude the study by placing Truman and Reagan within the wider context of US foreign policy during the Cold War and assessing their legacies. It will then proceed with a final analysis of the wider conceptual issues raised by the study of presidential agency in US foreign policy. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the present study and possibilities for future research.

### Truman: wider context and legacy

It is necessary to place Truman within the wider context of US foreign policy during the Cold War. Truman played a central role in the formulation of containment, which would become the dominant principle of US foreign policy for the next 30 years. The legacy of Truman is therefore central to our understanding of both the development of the Cold War and the broader role of the presidency in US foreign policy. Put simply, it was Truman who got the US into the Cold War. Truman developed containment, its militarisation, its overt ideological element, the bipartisan consensus to support these, and the development of the institutional US foreign policy presidency on the back of the National Security Act of 1947. He laid the basis for what would become known as the Imperial Presidency.

However, this was not predestined. Truman had options. The response to the crises in Greece and Turkey was not inevitable. As discussed in Chapter 3, when the US received word of British intentions to leave Greece and Turkey, intense discussions took place within the executive over how the crisis should be interpreted in light of developments in the international system. Debate centred over Soviet intentions and the fear of communist expansion. There were two groups working at the lower levels of the bureaucracy, the realists

and the cold warriors, who offered differing conceptualisations of the Soviet threat (the so called Yalta and Riga axioms).<sup>1</sup> There were different strategic paths available to US foreign policy decision-makers. They could refrain from intervention. They could make a one-off contribution to the Greek and Turkish governments. Or, as eventually happened, they could frame their intervention in terms of a worldwide programme to assist 'free peoples' who were facing the threat of 'subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures'.<sup>2</sup> This book argues that the role of the president was central to this process. Truman had decisions to make. It was his choice that set the US on the path to containment. The point made in the previous case study analysis was that this demonstrates the role of the president's worldview. Truman had begun to interpret Soviet actions in Eastern Europe and Iran as hostile to US interests. As a result, he began to favour the interpretation of the cold warriors, decreasing the bureaucratic influence of the realists in the State Department led by George Kennan. This was demonstrated in Chapter 3 when Truman's role in the drafting of the Truman Doctrine speech was analysed. However, there is also a wider point to be made about the existence of choice, the role of the president and the development of the Cold War.

The birth of the Truman Doctrine was not inevitable. Equally so, the militarisation of containment was the result of choice. As argued previously in Chapters 3 and 4, presidential worldview again played an important role in this process. The president chose to view the Soviet Union as a military threat, as did the advisors with whom he surrounded himself. The documentary record of the president's meetings with these officials time and again illustrates the extent to which all foreign and security policies were discussed in light of the Soviet military threat.<sup>3</sup> This worldview framed the development of US intervention in Korea. The deployment of US combat troops to Korea stands as one of the most important moments of US foreign policy during the Cold War. The case study in the previous chapter focused on the role of Truman's worldview and management style in terms of their impact in framing Korea as a security concern, the decision to intervene and the decision to cross the 38th parallel. However, the case study of Korea also stands in a wider context. It signalled the militarisation of containment and the president's rejection of Kennan's non-military alternative. From 1950 onwards the Soviet Union would be perceived as a military threat and US foreign policy would be orientated accordingly with ever-increasing defence spending, entering into collective security arrangements with ally states in various regions of strategic importance, long-term international commitments founded upon US led multilateral institutions and the deployment of the US military across the globe, culminating in the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s.

Truman's decision to enter the Korean War also had an important legacy for executive-congressional relations in foreign policy during the Cold War. Truman did not ask Congress for a declaration of war. Instead, he argued it was essential for the US to intervene in Korea to defend the United Nations, and, as a result of inherent executive power, as president he had all the

authority he needed to execute the UN resolutions authorising member states to use force to repel North Korea's invasion. This claim to inherent executive war-making power would form the basis of Johnson and Nixon's justification for ever-increasing US involvement in the Vietnam War and stands as one of Truman's most enduring legacies.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, just as important as the material legacy of Truman's militarisation of US foreign policy during the Cold War was his rhetorical justification for these policies and the Cold War ideological discourse he played a role in creating. As discussed previously, having decided to send aid to Greece and Turkey, Truman required Congress to authorise the funding of this programme. Agreeing with Senators Vandenberg and Clayton that he had to 'shock' the US Congress and the US public to win their support, Truman delivered a speech before Congress that tried to do just that.<sup>5</sup> The language used during the speech tapped into the defining characteristics of US political culture: freedom, liberty and democracy. Truman emphasised the need for US leadership of the free world in the face of totalitarian aggression. This commitment to help 'free peoples' and spread democracy became the ideological and rhetorical cornerstone which would reappear time and again in the public pronouncements of US foreign policy-makers during the remainder of the Cold War and beyond.<sup>6</sup> Truman played a crucial role over the course of his administration in creating this image of the US and how it viewed its role in the Cold War.

### **Reagan: wider context and legacy**

Although the Cold War would enter its final stages during the Reagan administration and end less than two years after he had left office, upon election in November 1980 it was not clear to any of the participants that international politics was about to undergo such a quick and radical change. As discussed in the Reagan case study, US foreign policy was firmly rooted within the existing Cold War structure upon Reagan's inauguration. After 30 years of bipolarity, the international system was relatively stable and US–Soviet Union relations were for the most part predictable, although forever conducted with the threat of nuclear destruction. However, US foreign policy faced what many policy-makers and commentators believed to be a series of problems.<sup>7</sup> The US's involvement in, escalation of and eventual retreat from the Vietnam War had produced a level of social and political opposition unseen before in the realm of US foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> American citizens were no longer willing to acquiesce in the use of military force abroad as they had previously. US foreign policy was now conducted in the 'post-Vietnam' era, and this placed significant domestic restraints on US foreign policy-makers. As a result, political discourse was dominated by the idea of American decline and weakness. This was compounded by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the perception of an increasingly powerful and assertive Soviet Union. The foreign policy of Jimmy Carter struggled to counter these

ideas, with its focus on multilateralism, human rights and a seeming weakening of containment.

During his election campaign and upon his inauguration Reagan promised to change this. He believed in American exceptionalism and was determined to restore America to what he believed was its former glory. Reagan rejected what he saw as the liberal defeatism of the Carter years and wished to spearhead a conservative revolution in both domestic and foreign policy. Domestically, Reagan argued in favour of free enterprise, deregulation and tax cuts to stimulate the US economy and provide the material basis for a resurgent foreign policy. This foreign policy would be based on Reagan's ideological worldview of international politics: the Soviet Union was the primary source of evil in the world and it was the responsibility of the US to defeat them. To do so, Reagan ordered an increase in defence spending and adopted a more overtly military posture. Equally important was the language used by Reagan to explain and justify these choices. The Soviet Union was the 'Evil Empire' who had 'openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognise is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat, in order to attain that'.<sup>9</sup> This was contrasted with his view of America: 'as we renew ourselves here in our own land, we will be seen as having greater strength throughout the world. We will again be the exemplar of freedom and a beacon of hope for those who do not now have freedom'.<sup>10</sup> This dichotomy framed Reagan's foreign policy at almost every level. Domestic renewal would lead to a more assertive foreign policy. Reagan issued a stark warning to 'the enemies of freedom' that 'peace is the highest aspiration of the American people. We will not negotiate for it, sacrifice for it; we will not surrender for it, now or ever'.<sup>11</sup> To secure this peace, Reagan would 'maintain sufficient strength to prevail if need be, knowing that if we do so we have the best chance of never having to use that strength'.<sup>12</sup> This idea of negotiating from a position of strength remained central to Reagan, and formed the basis of his foreign policy strategy throughout his administration.<sup>13</sup>

Reagan also attempted to place his own stamp on the US' strategy towards the Soviet Union and what he believed to be the worldwide threat of communism. As early as the 1960s Reagan had publicly stated his opposition to the policy of containment and argued in favour of a more aggressive alternative: 'Containment won't save freedom on the home front any more than it can stop Russian aggression on the world front...we must roll back the network of encroaching control'.<sup>14</sup> The idea of rollback became central to the doctrine which would eventually bear his name. The reality of international politics in the 1980s meant that no serious attempt could be made to rollback the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact in Eastern Europe. The threat of mutually assured destruction tempered this ambition. Understanding this structural constraint, Reagan turned his attention to what he saw as a major defeat for Carter's foreign policy, the victory of 'communist' rebels in several developing world countries. He believed the Soviet Union had helped these



groups attain power to spread communism throughout the developing world. It was in response to these events that Reagan planned to formulate a policy of rollback. He wanted to see these revolutions defeated and believed the US was in a position to help. As we saw in the Nicaragua case study, the specific policy developed was one that promised aid to anti-communist rebel forces who were trying to overthrow the newly installed communist governments. The success of the doctrine is still debated, but it stands as an example of Reagan's attempt to reassert America's power in the international system.

As Neustadt has argued, Reagan came to office with his purposes clear.<sup>15</sup> Reagan's team did the best they could to staff the executive with like-minded individuals. This was a clear attempt to bring ideological coherence to the White House. At the broad level it proved a success. Defence budgets were increased, America rearmed and the rhetoric directed towards the Soviet Union increased. However, as shown in Chapter 6, it was not possible for Reagan to maintain complete ideological coherence. Differences occurred between the moderate and hardline factions, who disagreed on the means to achieve the goal of rollback. Reagan was not able to manage effectively and Nicaragua stands as an example of this.

Reagan's Nicaragua policy is also important because it demonstrates the existence of the 'imperial presidency'. Future presidents will not cite the events surrounding the Iran–Contra as a precedent for inherent executive power in US foreign policy. However, Reagan's actions during the course of his administration serves as an example of what the president has the potential to do, even in the face of congressional opposition.

Finally, the legacy of Reagan extends beyond the Cold War. The combination of Reagan's increased defence spending and the collapse of the Soviet Union provided the material basis for the United States to establish itself as the hegemon of the 1990s and early twenty-first century. The idea of Reagan 'winning' the Cold War has formed the basis for post 1991 US foreign policy discourse and permeates current US foreign policy, most notably towards Russia.<sup>16</sup> It is used as evidence to support 'the end of history' thesis and contributes to the American sense of identity as leader of the free world. Furthermore the alleged victory of US ideals has formed the basis of official US government claims to the legitimacy of US hegemony since the end of the Cold War.<sup>17</sup> These claims have of course been challenged from a variety of perspectives, most notably by Al-Qaeda and the attacks of 9/11, which represent one of the most extreme forms of resistance to US claims of ideological hegemony. However, in terms of the remit of this book, this material and ideological legacy serves as an example of the influence of President Reagan.

### **Conceptual implications**

How much is in the president's control and how much is contingent on other actors? This question is perhaps misleading. There is very little the president

can do entirely on his own. He relies on other actors at every stage of the process: advisors who bring him information and who he discusses policy options with; bureaucrats who offer solutions to implementing policy (and who actually implement policy); and Congress who authorise funding. These actors are all part of the process. The president needs to 'line up' enough of these actors on his side to ensure a policy is enacted. Whether that policy is 'successful' or not depends not only on the president's personal skill, but on factors outwith the president's control, such as Congress and other states in the international system.

Another complication is how we determine 'success'. It is possible to conceive of and measure success in different ways. To look at one eight-year Nicaragua policy in the case of Reagan and try to determine if it was a success or not is a challenge. Instead it is possible to look at certain parts and determine if there was a success or not. For example, one obvious success would be Reagan securing military funding for the Contras in 1985 and 1986. There was a constraint in the shape of congressional opposition, he acted by spearheading an intense legislative campaign, and he was successful in winning the necessary votes. We can identify the role of the president in personally securing a selection of swing voters. However, during the same two-year period and in relation to the same Nicaragua policy, the Iran-Contra scandal was set in motion by the same president. This decision ended up destroying Reagan's Nicaragua policy in the last two years of his presidency. This is clearly a failure. Yet we have success and failure occurring at the same time on the same policy. Likewise there are examples of success and failure from Truman. Securing aid to Greece and Turkey from a Republican congress was a success. Intervening in Korea was a success until November 1950. The decision to cross the parallel could have been a success if Truman had limited his objective to defeating the North Korean army and not advancing too far north. However, Truman's decision to approaching the Yalu River, which resulted in China's intervention in the war, was clearly a failure.

The common thread running through the Truman and Reagan case studies is that both presidents had options. Truman did not have to send aid to Greece and Turkey, or frame his decision to do so in terms of a global struggle against totalitarianism. Nor did he have to frame Korea as a security threat and order US troops to cross the 38th parallel. Reagan did not have to rank Nicaragua as a security threat, or arm the Contras. He did not have to empower the NSC in the face of congressional opposition, or authorise the search for third country donors, or cut Shultz out of the decision-making process. These were all choices made by the president.

The very fact that choice exists provides justification for adopting an approach which incorporates human agency. To adopt a wholly structural approach runs the risk of arguing in favour of historical determinism, where choice does not exist and events are predetermined because of the overwhelming influence of social structures. Likewise, adopting a purely agency-based approach may fail to take into account the fact that choice is not

exercised within a vacuum. Therefore, this monograph has adopted a multi-level approach, which argues agents and structures are mutually constitutive. It contributes to the multi-level analysis literature by offering an agency-based perspective of US foreign policy decision-making. The book is an attempt to bridge the gap between foreign policy analysis and international relations.<sup>18</sup>

### **Looking forward and future research**

The multi-level approach of foreign policy analysis is data intensive. Therefore this project has only been able to compare a limited number of policies across two presidencies. Future research will be able to apply this framework across other policies during these administrations, as well as to the foreign policies of other presidents. In terms of methodology and the large amount of primary documents required to conduct this level of detailed analysis, this will probably be limited to presidencies from before Reagan as a result of the classification process placing restrictions on the availability of high-level US foreign policy documents. It may be possible to conduct a more basic analysis of the more recent presidents if the researcher has access to interview the highest-ranking members of these administrations. However, it is unlikely that any researcher will have the level of access and security clearance required to conduct such a study of a contemporary president.

Conceptually, this study demonstrates that further research is needed into the relationship between presidential worldview and management style. It is possible to locate other aspects of US foreign policy that could provide empirical evidence for further analysis. Continuing with the Reagan administration, the Iran side of the Iran–Contra scandal would appear to provide ample opportunity to further analyse the extent to which Reagan was able to reshape his management structure to try to secure the release of the Lebanon hostages, again cutting out senior members of his foreign policy team to pursue a goal he viewed as important. Other examples could be the pursuit of SDI and Reagan's attempts to shape foreign policy rhetoric, often conflicting with the senior members of his foreign policy and speechwriting teams. Reagan's foreign policy continues to be an important topic, with major works published recently by Lettow, Mann and Anderson and Anderson, but the focus remains heavily on Soviet policy.<sup>19</sup> Little attention has been paid to Reagan's Nicaragua policy over the past decade. This study has begun to fill this gap by laying the foundation for future research. As more documents are declassified over the coming years it is hoped that scholars will return to one of the most important and controversial foreign policies of the Reagan era. In doing so, the academic evaluation of Reagan will continue to progress.

Finally, foreign policy analysis continues to be dominated by US studies. The multi-level framework developed in this monograph could be applied to other states to analyse the role of individual chief executives, their worldview, their management style and how they operate within the multi-level framework of their specific domestic and international context. In the wake of the

terrorist attacks of 9/11, Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, demonstrated his belief in human agency and the potential for individual leaders to make a difference: 'This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken, the pieces are in flux, soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us reorder this world around us'.<sup>20</sup> One can hope the findings of this book will contribute to the conceptualisation of agency in foreign policy and international relations, and that further studies will try to address the issues it has raised.

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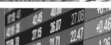
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